



Constructing Kallipolis: The Political Argument of Plato's Socratic Dialogues

Citation

Muller, Joe Pahl Williams. 2016. Constructing Kallipolis: The Political Argument of Plato's Socratic Dialogues. Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33493293>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

**Constructing Kallipolis:
The Political Argument of Plato's Socratic Dialogues**

A dissertation presented
by
Joe Pahl Williams Muller
to
The Department of Government

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
Political Science

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 2016

© 2016 Joe Pahl Williams Muller

All rights reserved.

Dissertation Advisors:
Professor Eric Nelson
Professor Rusty Jones

Joe Pahl Williams Muller

**Constructing Kallipolis:
The Political Argument of Plato's Socratic Dialogues**

Abstract

This dissertation examines the political argument of Plato's Socratic dialogues. Common interpretations of these texts suggest, variously: (1) that Socrates does not offer much in the way of a political theory; (2) that Socrates does reflect on politics but ultimately rejects political institutions as irrelevant to his ethical concerns; (3) that Socrates arrives at a political theory that either accepts or even celebrates free and democratic political arrangements. Against such interpretations, this dissertation examines Plato's early work and demonstrates: (1') that Socrates does engage in serious reflection on political institutions and on the question of the best regime; (2') that Socrates recognizes that political institutions are of central importance to his ethical concerns; (3') that Socrates rejects democracy, specifically, or political and cultural freedom, generally, as tending to corrupt the citizenry and lead to misery rather than happiness. In the Socratic dialogues, then, we find Plato intentionally "constructing Kallipolis," one argument at a time.

1. The first essay examines the *Charmides* and Socrates' argument there that it is impossible for an amateur to ever reliably distinguish between experts and non-experts in a knowledge that she does not herself possess. This argument poses a fundamental challenge to democracy, which relies on the ability of amateurs to reliably select good rulers, but

the argument does not license such revolutionary action as Socrates' interlocutors Critias and Charmides would historically undertake.

2. The second essay examines the *Gorgias*, seeking to understand one of Socrates' favorite paradoxes: that doing wrong makes the wrongdoer miserable. The essay demonstrates that Socrates' contention is supported by an argument about appetite and psychological self-harm that anticipates the more elaborate theory of the *Republic*. This argument, and especially the thought that the wrongdoer's judgment comes to be seriously distorted by her vice, provides a moral-psychological explanation of the difficulty of reforming a corrupt culture and suggests the value, on Socrates' account, of non-rational forms of persuasion.

3. The third essay examines the *Protagoras* and its attack on sophistry. The dialogue argues that any free society will tend toward corruption, on account of the operation of unscrupulous clever speakers who aim to disrupt traditional morality. The solution to this problem is suggested in Socrates sketch of a "philosophical Sparta," a regime that anticipates the Kallipolis of the *Republic* in many respects, especially in the strict control of poetry (i.e., the rejection of political and cultural freedom).

Considered together, these three essays show that Plato's Socrates is no democrat. From the beginning he looks toward a radically new kind of politics, an unfree society ruled by a philosophical elite.

| Contents

Abstract	iii
1 How to Find an Expert? Knowledge of Knowledge and Expert Rule in Plato's <i>Charmides</i>	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Testing Craft Knowledges	4
1.2.1 The City of Experts	4
1.2.2 Is Knowledge of Knowledge Impossible?	7
1.2.3 What the City of Experts Lacks	9
1.3 Testing Knowledge of Good and Bad	14
1.3.1 Finding Rulers	14
1.3.2 Previous Strategies Fail	16
1.3.3 Socratic Examination Also Fails	19
1.4 Socrates the Revolutionary?	23
1.4.1 Critias and the Thirty	28
1.5 Testing Oneself	32
1.5.1 The Need for Self-Examination	32
1.5.2 The Problem of Self-Assurance	34
1.6 A Political Aporia?	39
2 Why is the Tyrant Unhappy? Plato's <i>Gorgias</i> on the Futility of Vice	44
2.1 The Successful Tyrant	44
2.2 A Puzzle: Health of the Soul	49
2.3 The Disordered Soul	55
2.3.1 How Ought We Live?	55

2.3.2	Evidence of Socrates' View	58
2.3.3	Appetite and the Soul	62
2.4	The Misery of Vice	70
2.4.1	The Misery of the Ordinary Wrongdoer	70
2.4.2	The Superhumanly Successful Tyrant	74
2.5	Vice and Poor Judgment	79
2.5.1	A Weakness of Instrumental Reasoning?	80
2.5.2	Resistance to Persuasion	84
2.5.3	The Mistake that the Wrongdoer Makes	90
2.6	Conclusion: Psychology, Ethics, and Politics	93
2.6.1	The Target to Look to in Living	94
2.6.2	Psychology and Politics	97
3	Peddlers of Praise: Plato's <i>Protagoras</i> Against Democracy	101
3.1	Introduction	101
3.2	Education and Socialization	103
3.2.1	Protagoras' Great Speech	103
3.2.2	Hippocrates the Student	106
3.3	Socrates v. Protagoras	110
3.3.1	Protagoras the Sophist	110
3.3.2	Socrates the Philosopher	115
3.4	Simonides the Sophist	123
3.4.1	First Sophists	124
3.4.2	Simonides for Sale	127
3.4.3	Some Consequences	131
3.5	Constructing Kallipolis	134
3.5.1	Against Crowd Politics	134
3.5.2	Against Free Society	137
3.5.3	A Philosophical Sparta	141
3.5.4	Conclusion	146
	Bibliography	150

For my parents, John and Sandy

For my teachers, David and Rusty

For my husband Benjamin

1 | How to Find an Expert? Knowledge of Knowledge and Expert Rule in Plato's *Charmides*

1.1 Introduction

[1] If Socrates means what he is always saying about knowledge and happiness, then what does this suggest about his political commitments?¹ Socrates is notorious for the claim that virtue is knowledge, that is, that only action guided by expert knowledge will (reliably) benefit us and bring us closer to happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*). And when it comes to politics, this technical vision of life can produce arguments that sound quite authoritarian in their tendency.

[2] For example, in his protreptic to the young Lysis, Socrates suggests that Lysis' parents prohibit him from certain activities not because he is not yet of age, but because he does not yet possess the relevant knowledge (*Lys.* 209c). If Lysis *did* know what he were doing, Socra-

1. The Socrates under consideration is the character Socrates in Plato's "Socratic" dialogues, typically considered to represent the author's early work. A standard list of the Socratic texts, including several now thought to be spurious, might include the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, *Hipparchus*, *Rival Lovers*, *Theages*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Greater Hippias*, *Lesser Hippias*, *Ion*, *Menexenus*, *Clitophon*, and *Minos*. List drawn from Cooper (1997, p. xv).

tes suggests, then his father would immediately entrust himself and his whole estate to Lysis' care. And Socrates continues: Lysis' neighbor would use the same rule and so would the Athenian people—"and by Zeus!", he exclaims, even the Great King himself would completely entrust all of his affairs to Lysis should he come to believe that Lysis knew better than he how to manage them. And so Socrates draws his conclusion:

So, my dear Lysis, this is how it stands: when it comes to things we really understand, everyone ... will trust in us, and in such affairs we will act just as we choose and no one will want to obstruct us; we will ourselves be free and we will rule others in these matters ... since we will benefit from handling them ourselves [and since we will also benefit others]. But where we still lack understanding, nobody will leave it to us to deal with matters as we see fit and in fact everyone will do their very best to stop us ... and in these affairs we will be others' subjects ... since we will not benefit from handling them ourselves [and since we will not benefit others either].
(*Lys.* 210a–c)

[3] While in his exhortation to the boy Socrates suppresses some of his commitments that he would need to fully justify such a sweeping conclusion,² the general point—the upshot of Socrates' craft analogy—is

-
2. E.g. Socrates' commitment to motivational intellectualism and his belief that it is never in one's interest to do wrong. From the conjunction of such commitments Socrates arrives at the result that the non-expert can safely place complete trust in the moral-political expert, since she (1) knows what is truly best for the non-expert, (2) knows that what is best for the non-expert is also best for herself, and (3) will never act contrary to her knowledge of what is best (which is best both for all and for each).

I should note in particular that I have inserted the bracketed phrases in the block quotation. While the thought is necessary to make Socrates' argument work, and while is one that Socrates is committed to, Socrates elides the much less conventional commitment when he moves from the case of Lysis' father to that of Lysis' neighbor (the elision is explained by

no doubt quite clear.³ So we ask ourselves, then: is Socrates committed to a political ideal in which moral-political experts have absolute control over the city and over the lives of the non-experts in it? Is the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues looking toward the Kallipolis of the *Republic*? And if so, then how do his arguments work to show the way to Plato's readers?

[4] In view of these questions, this chapter examines Plato's *Charmides* in an attempt to get a better grasp on Socratic politics.⁴ In particular, I consider Socrates' argument in the *Charmides* that a "knowledge of what someone does and does not know" is impossible. In other words, that it is impossible to reliably recognize expertise and expose ignorance when it comes to a body of knowledge that one does not oneself possess. (For convenience, I refer to this ability as "knowledge of knowledge.") This is a very troubling argument for Socrates, given his commitment to expert living; while the *Charmides* may leave room for a knowledge of productive craft knowledges, the argument of the dialogue ultimately rules out as impossible the knowledge of knowledge that would be of

the protreptic context).

For discussion of Socrates' motivational intellectualism and his belief that it is never in one's interest to do wrong, see the *Gorgias* chapter.

3. In addition to *Lysis* 207–210, see e.g. *Euthydemus* 278–282, *Meno* 87–89. Bobonich (2002, pp. 140–145) does a fine job summing up this "productive account" of the value of knowledge according to Socrates (though he wrongly rejects it as an interpretation of Socrates' commitments). Reshotko (2006) elaborates a full defense of a Socrates rather along these lines (although I depart from Reshotko in certain crucial respects, in this chapter and in the next).
4. Translations of Plato are from Cooper (1997) with occasional modification or substitution of my own translations. Translations of the *Charmides* have in places been revised substantially.

most interest to the Socratic—the knowledge of the knowledge of good and bad.

[5] The claim that it is impossible for moral-political amateurs to reliably identify moral-political experts amounts to a fundamental attack on democratic political arrangements, which rely on the ability of ordinary, non-expert citizens to find experts to advise them. But if ordinary citizens cannot be counted on to select good advisors, then is it the suggestion of the *Charmides* that the best thing for the ethical expert to do would be to seize absolute power in the city? — The dialogue does not, however, reach such a revolutionary conclusion. For the argument pushes the problem of testing knowledge further: it denies that the expert in good and bad could ever recognize her own expertise,⁵ at least to such a degree of confidence as to authorize radical political action. The *Charmides* appears to end, then, in a political aporia, leaving us with an intractable problem of self-assurance and a warning for the would-be authoritarian not to be so bold. Socrates may not be an expert in the good, but even the expert in the good ought to act like Socrates.

1.2 Testing Craft Knowledges

1.2.1 The City of Experts

[6] At the midpoint of Plato's *Charmides*, Socrates' interlocutor Critias redirects their conversation (164c ff.).⁶ They have been searching for the

5. This thought goes unrecognized in the literature.

6. References are to the *Charmides* unless otherwise specified.

virtue of *σωφροσύνη* (*sôphrosunê*),⁷ and the first three attempts at a definition have failed. Critias now suggests that the key to the virtue may be found in the Delphic dictum, “know thyself” (*γνῶθι σαυτόν*). After a couple rounds with Socrates, this self-knowledge turns into a “knowledge of knowledge,” the “knowledge of what someone does and does not know.” Socrates sums this up as the ability to reliably distinguish between true and false claims to knowledge in any field whatever (167a). He imagines a city equipped with such a knowledge that uses it to recruit experts and debar non-experts for its every endeavor. And as he sees it, this seems very valuable:

If ... the *sôphrôn* person knew what he knew and what he did not know ... and if he were able to examine another person in the same situation, then we claim that it would be the greatest benefit for us to be *sôphrôn*. For those of us with *sôphrosunê* would live our lives free from error and so would all those under our rule. Neither would we ourselves attempt to do anything which we did not know how to do—instead we would seek out those who did know how and hand the matter over to them—nor would we entrust the performance of anything to those whom we ruled except for what they would do correctly. And that would be the thing of which they had the knowledge. And so in this way, under *sôphrosunê*, every household would be well-run and every city well-governed, in every case where *sôphrosunê* ruled. For with error removed and rightness guiding, men so circumstanced would necessarily act nobly and well in their every action and, acting well, they would be happy. (171d–172a)

... Everything [in such a city] would be done according to knowledge. Someone claiming to be a pilot who was not one would not deceive us. Neither would ... any other man pre-

7. Commonly translated as “self-control”, “moderation”, “temperance”, “sound-mindedness,” though always with the caveat that these fail to capture the full range of meanings associated with the Greek word. See North (1966) and Rademaker (2005) for detailed study. Tuozzo (2011, pp. 90–98) has a fine overview. I choose to transliterate.

tending (*προσποιούμενος*) to know something he did not ... Our bodies would be healthier than they are now, and we would be safe when in danger at sea or in war, and we would have dishes and clothes and shoes and all things skillfully (*τεχνικῶς*) wrought for us, and many other things too, because we would be using true craftsmen (*δημιουργοῖς*) ... So equipped, the human race would act and live knowledgeably. For *sôphrosunê*, keeping guard, would not permit ignorance to creep in and become our fellow-worker (*συνεργόν*). (173b–d)

[7] Socrates' positive evaluation of this City of Experts⁸ follows easily from his usual comments on the value of knowledge.⁹ All human beings wish to be happy, he says. But action benefits us (contributes to our happiness) only when performed correctly; performed incorrectly it harms us (contributes to our misery). Although right opinion can guide us correctly in some particular instance, opinion is unstable and unreliable and so we desire knowledge as the only reliable guide to correct action. It is easy to see the value of a knowledge of knowledge under such an account. Equipped with this ability, the City of Experts is able to secure a knowledgeable practitioner for every task and prevent ignorant practitioners from doing damage in their ignorance. In most ordinary circumstances, the ability to test others for knowledge in any field whatever would be able to secure us happiness.¹⁰ And this is why Socrates

-
8. If there are in fact any differences between the city as described at 171d–172a and at 173, they do not affect my argument.
 9. So far I have offered a deliberately incomplete description of Socrates' commitments, leaving out the all-important knowledge of good and bad. I follow the drama of the dialogue. Following Plato, I hope to get a first pass at the argument in a simplified form before moving to the more complicated case.
 10. "Ordinary circumstances"—a situation in which the necessary experts are available and external events are at least minimally cooperative (e.g., no

sets such a high value on a knowledge of knowledge.

1.2.2 Is Knowledge of Knowledge Impossible?

[8] Unfortunately for this Socratic hope, however, the *Charmides* asserts that any ability like this knowledge of knowledge is impossible (170e–171c). When examining a person who claims to be a doctor, Socrates says, we are interested in her knowledge of health and disease. So we must “look into the manner of her words and actions to see if what she says is truly spoken and what she does is correctly done.” The problem is that if we are not ourselves medical experts, we have no way of knowing whether the doctor under examination speaks and acts correctly. This sort of *direct examination* of knowledge is impossible for anyone who is not an expert in the same field. In other words, “it takes one to know one.”

[9] Faced with Socrates’ argument, the reader wonders: does he believe what he is saying? At the very least it seems to be in tension with his words and actions in other dialogues. For example, he reports in the *Apology* how he sought out those thought wise and was disappointed: “I found that those who had the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more knowledgeable” (*Ap.* 22a). Eventually he goes to the craftsmen in his search for someone wise: “for I knew that I knew practically nothing, and I knew that I would find *these* men, at least, to know many fine things” (*Ap.* 22cd). Socrates is confident that he has discovered that those with a rep-

hurricane comes along to ruin all of our expert efforts). This picture of Socrates denies the sufficiency of wisdom for happiness. See Jones (2013) for relevant discussion of the *Euthydemus*.

utation for wisdom are not in fact wise and that he has identified others who are more knowledgeable (though not fully wise). He is also confident that the craftsmen know “many fine things,” though he is not a craftsman himself. So can Socrates confidence in the *Apology* be squared with his argument in the *Charmides* that only experts can know experts?

[10] As it turns out, it is not very difficult to explain the assurance in the craftsmen’s knowledge that Socrates expresses in the *Apology*. He knows the carpenters of Athens to be good carpenters because he has experience of their products. In fact, across the dialogues Socrates often rehearses evidence-based strategies for identifying experts. For example, *Laches* 184c–187b considers how to find experts when we are not experts ourselves. If we were looking for the most expert in gymnastics, Socrates says, “wouldn’t it be the man who has studied and practiced the art and who had good teachers in that particular subject?” (*Lach.* 185b). Since experts will probably have spent considerable time practicing their craft, we can take a person’s practice as some evidence that she is more likely to know what she is doing. While Socrates also suggests that we can ask if she has had expert teachers, this only shifts, but does not resolve, the puzzle—for we would then have to go test the teachers themselves (*Lach.* 186ab).

[11] Ultimately, then, all evidence-based strategies will rely on experience of a well-made product: “you would not want to trust [people] when they said they were good craftsmen unless they should have some well-executed product of their art to display (ἐπιδείξαι) to you—and not just one but more than one” (*Lach.* 185e–186a). If the supposed expert can point to such products, this gives us strong evidence of her knowledge. And a failure or refusal to demonstrate her skill could reasonably

be taken (at least for practical purposes) as evidence of ignorance.

[12] In the case of certain knowledges, then, it seems possible for non-experts to reliably identify expert practitioners of the art and to expose ignorant practitioners by relying on evidence (especially over time).¹¹ The pilots and doctors and generals and weavers can still be tested, it seems—all that is required is that the knowledge in question have a concrete and uncontroversial product that the non-expert can evaluate. This will be the case for the “many fine” craft knowledges that Socrates knows the craftsmen to possess. Perhaps it will be true for other knowledges too. Using this ability to recruit experts and debar non-experts from those endeavors we might be able, after all, to realize to some extent the City of Experts and so, to that extent, come closer to happiness.

1.2.3 What the City of Experts Lacks

[13] But the City of Experts is flawed, as any reader familiar with the Socratic dialogues will recognize. And so at *Charmides* 172c–175a, Socrates revises his initially positive evaluation of the city. “We carelessly agreed,” he tells Critias, “that it would be a great good for human beings if each of us should do the things he knows and should hand over the things he does not know to others who do know” (172d). Socrates now questions what he and Critias have been assuming for some time: that simply by acting knowledgeably human beings necessarily fare well and are happy (173d). Critias objects: “you will not readily gain the prize of acting well by any other means if you disenfranchise knowledge.” Socrates presses him: “teach me one small thing more. ‘Knowledgeably’ of

11. As both Tuozzo (2001) and Benson (2003) point out.

what, do you mean? — Of shoecutting?” He continues by asking whether it is of bronze-working or of wool or of wood that Critias means his “knowledgeably.” Critias the aristocrat is quick to reject the notion that such vulgar knowledges could lead to happiness, allowing Socrates to conclude that “we cannot then keep to the argument that the one living knowledgeably is happy, for you do not agree that these people who live knowledgeably are happy, but rather you seem to me to define the happy man as the one who lives knowledgeably concerning certain specific things.”

[14] The interlocutors must now specify which particular knowledge it is that secures human happiness (173e–174d). Socrates asks Critias to imagine an omniscient man, ignorant of nothing. Nobody lives more knowledgeably than this man, so: “which of the knowledges makes him happy? — Or do they all do so equally?” Critias cannot agree to *that*, and after a brief exchange he comes up with the claim that the knowledge that makes their omniscient man happy is “that by which he knows what is good and what is bad.” Socrates gives an exaggerated response:

Oh you wretch! For a long time now you’ve been leading me around in a circle,¹² concealing from me that it was not living

12. Critias initiates the circle when he redirects their conversation at 164. In brief, the argument prior to that point suggested “doing good things” as a candidate for virtue. Socrates pushes the argument toward “*knowingly* doing good things” and Critias seizes on the “knowingly” and loses sight of the “good.” The pivot in the argument, then, rests on Critias’ acceptance of the claim at 164b that the doctor who cures his patient “does something beneficial,” just like that.

Through the second half of the dialogue, then, while the interlocutors consider the possibility and the benefit of knowledge of knowledge, the “good” of all knowledges is simply assumed—all craft goods are assumed to be simply valuable, to straightforwardly contribute to happiness—and the “knowingly” on which the argument has seized is understood specifically

knowledgeably that makes us act well and be happy, not even with all the other knowledge put together—but rather, that it’s only with this one knowledge, the knowledge about good and bad. (174bc)¹³

Socrates continues. In the absence of this knowledge, all the other knowledges would still produce their products—the doctor would make us healthy, the pilot would prevent us from dying at sea and the general from dying in war—but “to have any of these things well and beneficially done will be out of our reach if that knowledge is lacking” (174d).¹⁴

[15] Socrates revises his initially positive assessment of the imagined City of Experts because that city does not incorporate the knowledge

as how to attain these goods. This is the foundation of the City of Experts and it is against this supposition of simple goodness that Socrates’ final argument brings the “good” back into consideration, insisting that the craft knowledges themselves do not simply secure goodness and benefit.

The return of knowledge of the good is no surprise. It is familiar from many other dialogues, and as Irwin (1995) points out, given certain Socratic premises, the knowledge of good and bad is the only possible outcome of the Socratic search for a definition of virtue.

13. ἀποκρυπτόμενος ὅτι οὐ τὸ ἐπιστημόνως ἦν ζῆν τὸ εὖ πράττειν τε καὶ εὐδαιμονεῖν ποιοῦν, οὐδὲ συμπασῶν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν, ἀλλὰ μᾶς οὔσης ταύτης μόνον τῆς περὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν τε καὶ κακόν. — Tuozzo (2011, p. 277 n. 41) suggests that “the words *μᾶς οὔσης ταύτης μόνον* speak strongly against the suggestions of Reshotko (2006) 170 that in the *Charmides* Socrates holds that happiness requires ‘omniscience,’ that is, the possession of all the knowledges.” But whatever we make of Reshotko’s position (which does go too far), I see no need to take these few words as strongly as Tuozzo does. His translation reflects his interpretation: “... not even with all the sciences, but rather *with only* this one knowledge” (emphasis added). I take the *μόνον* differently, as leaving open the possibility that more might be required for happiness than just the knowledge of good and bad (so: “it’s *only with* this one knowledge”). Socrates’ claim at this point only requires the more modest reading; I see no need to adopt the much more radical claim that Tuozzo sees.
14. Trans. Lamb (substituting “knowledge” for his “science”): τὸ εὖ γε τούτων ἕκαστα γίγνεσθαι καὶ ὠφελίμως ἀπολελοιπὸς ἡμᾶς ἔσται ταύτης ἀπούσης.

of good and bad that is necessary if otherwise-knowledgeable action is to (reliably) benefit us. The Socratic commitment to expert living is not the thought that we should live under the guidance of *just any* knowledge, but the insistence that we must be guided by *this one* knowledge, the knowledge of what is good and bad. For the City of Experts is able to secure any number of apparently good things—health, wealth, and so on—, but in themselves these remain only “neither good nor bad”; just on their own they could prove either beneficial or harmful to the city. So we should not be fooled into thinking that the many goods enjoyed by the City of Experts are a sign that the city is happy. As Socrates puts the point in the *Gorgias*, the expert ship captain can save his passengers from death at sea, but

He’s enough of an expert, I suppose, to conclude that it isn’t clear which ones of his fellow voyagers he has benefitted by not letting them drown in the deep, and which ones he has harmed, knowing that they were no better in either body or soul when he set them ashore than they were when they embarked. (*Gorg.* 511e–512a)

Or as Nicias puts it in his Socratic turn in the *Laches*:

The seer’s business is to judge only the signs of what is yet to come—whether a man is to meet with death or disease or loss of property, or victory or defeat in war or some other contest; but what is better among these things for a man to suffer or avoid suffering, can surely be no more for a seer to decide than for anyone else in the world. (*Laches* 195e–196a)¹⁵

[16] The City of Experts in the *Charmides* has been equipped with just such an art of divination (173c, 174a) and yet even so it fails to secure

15. Trans. Lamb.

happiness in the absence of knowledge of the good.¹⁶ In fact, without this knowledge the many apparent goods that the expert city can secure for itself may well prove *bad* for it insofar as it is liable to use them incorrectly and so harm itself.¹⁷ The craft-centered City of Experts, then, is no ideal to which we should aspire. Some knowledge of craft knowledges is possible, but like those knowledges and their products, this ability is only conditionally valuable: we have reason to value it only if we have knowledge of good and bad; otherwise it may not prove good for us after all.¹⁸

-
16. The suggested relation of craft knowledge, divination, and the knowledge of good and bad in the *Charmides* and in the *Gorgias* and *Laches* passages cited can be helpfully compared to the Myth of Er from the *Republic* and the story there of how souls choose their future lives: they have what the *Laches* calls “the signs of what is to be” but only a knowledge of virtue will help them determine whether “what is to be” in any given life-plan will actually prove beneficial or harmful to them. Hence the exhortation that Socrates presses on Glaukon and Adeimantus.

This is suggestive of the character of the “knowledge of good and bad” in the Socratic dialogues. Consider the role of health of the soul in Socrates’ Zalmoxian medicine speech at the beginning of the dialogue (warning to readers without Greek: Sprague’s translation of the passage is quite misleading); see the chapter on the *Gorgias*.

17. Reshotko (2006, p. 170) makes the rather odd suggestion that the *Charmides* supposes that there is no need for any knowledge other than the sum of all craft knowledges. But that is precisely the claim that the reevaluation of the omniscient City of Experts is designed to reject!
18. Although Socrates revises his initially positive assessment of the craft-centered City of Experts, we should not suppose that this reassessment amounts to a rejection of the ideal of error-free or expert living that made the city seem so attractive at first. Stern (1999), e.g., affiliates the expert city with Critias and divorces it from Socrates. It is certainly true that Critias is attracted to an ideal of expert living, but we cannot ignore the prevalence in the Socratic dialogues of Socrates’ own commitment to such an ideal. The City of Experts is rejected not because it is expert but because it lacks expertise in the one knowledge that really matters. Stern (1999, p. 410) writes: “If we are ourselves of sufficient complexity to elude our own self-understanding, then any claim for a homogeneous, unprob-

1.3 Testing Knowledge of Good and Bad

1.3.1 Finding Rulers

[17] The “knowledge of what someone does and does not know” that underpins the *Charmides*’ City of Experts seems very useful under the Socratic framework. Because action (reliably) benefits us only when it is guided by knowledge, and harms us when it is guided by ignorance, we would like to be able to recruit experts for every task and prevent ignorance from ever becoming our “fellow-worker.” But Socrates argues that such an ability is impossible. Only doctors can verify claims to medical knowledge, he says: the layman cannot examine a claim to expertise. Now, it turns out that in the case of some knowledges a non-expert *can* in fact distinguish between genuine and false practitioners by means of evidence. But the craft knowledges that can thus be guaranteed are insufficient for happiness, for their products are only “neither good nor bad” and reliably benefit us only when guided by knowledge of the good. The craft knowledges and the knowledge of knowledge that can secure them, then, are themselves only conditionally valuable. This is the fundamental flaw with the craft-centered City of Experts.

[18] To help us get a grip on the shortcoming of the City of Experts, consider that, although the City will always employ “true craftsmen” for any of its projects, it does not have an expertise to help it decide which projects are worth pursuing in the first place. This leaves a curious absence in its political deliberation, with craftsmen expertly producing

lematic view of human good becomes dubious.” — But this hardly sounds like *Socrates*.

goods with no one to direct their efforts. The City of Experts lacks expert managers; this is why it is rejected.¹⁹ The most obvious strategy for addressing this shortcoming, then, is to hope to find those with knowledge of good and bad and to follow their advice in managing the city.

[19] Such a political ideal is the natural result of Socrates' commitment to virtue as expert living. Consider for example *Protagoras* 319a–320b, where Socrates contrasts the behavior of the Athenian Assembly when facing questions for which the Athenians believe there is expert knowledge (ship-building and so on) with its behavior when it comes to the general administration of the city. Setting aside the details of the passage, we see the political ideal. The Athenians should expand their practice of searching for expert advisors. More to the point: since the ordinary citizen is no ethical expert and since we should not attempt to do anything we do not know how to do but should instead seek out those who do know and entrust them with the matter, then if we are to be

19. Insofar as Reshotko (2006) relies on denying the possibility of knowledge of knowledge in making her claim that the knowledge of good and bad at issue in the *Charmides* is “omniscience” in the sense of a simple aggregate of the sort of craft knowledges described in the City of Experts, we can reject the suggestion. She argues that, because we are unable to verify others' knowledge, we could reliably contribute to our own happiness only if we possessed every knowledge for ourselves (and had all constraints of time etc. removed). But not only does this misread the point of Socrates' reevaluation of the City of Experts, as mentioned, but also (1) it goes against the obvious suggestion of the dialogue's repeated suggestion that the division of labor is valuable and important and (2) it misses the fact that we can make decent progress in identifying craft-experts through the use of evidence. The ethical expert, we might say, can in fact advance her own happiness and the happiness of her city by employing craft knowledges that she does not herself possess. To adapt a line from the law, Socrates can reasonably maintain that “we can have ... a government that benefits from [craft-]expertise without being ruled by [craft-]experts” (Roberts writing in *Free Enterprise Fund v. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board*, 2010).

happy we must seek expert rulers to take control of the city.

[20] This political dream, of finding ethical experts to advise or to rule the city, gives Socrates every reason to want a “knowledge of ethical knowledge,” and every reason to be dismayed by the argument of the *Charmides* that no amateur could ever reliably identify experts. Ordinary citizens may wish for expert rulers (or, they would so wish if they knew what would be good for them), but they prove unable to find such benefactors.²⁰ Here the previous argument may offer some hope: Might it turn out, as it did for craft knowledges, that there is in the end some way to reliably identify expertise and expose ignorance when it comes to the knowledge of good and bad? If so, we will be able to supply what the craft-centered City of Experts lacked and could hope to secure happiness. So is such a knowledge of ethical knowledge possible?

1.3.2 Previous Strategies Fail

[21] Unfortunately for this Socratic hope, knowledge of ethical knowledge will prove impossible. To begin, it is obvious that direct examination of supposed moral experts is straightforwardly ruled out by the “it takes one to know one” argument (170e–171c). Those ignorant of good and bad cannot “look into the manner of [the claimant’s] words and actions to see if what he says is truly spoken and what he does is correctly done.”

[22] But a knowledge of craft knowledge was shown to be possible

20. Socrates of course has another reason to desire knowledge of ethical knowledge: to find expert teachers, whatever the political circumstances. This is the hope that he expresses in the *Apology* and we commonly find him exhorting his friends to join him in the search for expert teachers of virtue (*Laches* 200e–201a).

through the use of evidence. Will such an approach work for knowledge of the good? Socrates often seems to suggest as much, that we might be able to judge whether someone is a moral expert by asking questions like: Who taught him? Is he just? Has he made anyone else just?²¹ This amounts to an evidence-based approach to identifying virtue. If we would want to trust a person who claimed expertise only if she had several well-executed products to show off to us (*Laches* 185e–186a), then Socrates may well think that we could examine the “products” of the supposed expert’s work in the realm of virtue and so determine whether or not she is qualified to lead the city or teach us knowledge of the good.²²

[23] But we cannot rely on evidence as a means to acquire knowledge of ethical knowledge. For unless we know the good ourselves we have no way to tell what counts as evidence of moral expertise. It does not take great skill to distinguish between, say, chairs that are well or poorly made. But just what would serve as evidence of expert virtue? Conventionally-applauded action (“Is this person just?”) does not pass Socratic muster;²³ a reputation for virtue is no reliable indicator of moral expertise. As Socrates recounts in the *Apology*, “those who had the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient” (*Ap.* 22a) and Critias himself has an excellent reputation but does not fare too well with Socra-

21. E.g., *Gorgias* 513d–515b, *Meno* 93a–94e, *Protagoras* 319.

22. In fact, the *Charmides* itself is subtly framed as just such an epideictic challenge to Critias: that Critias display the work that he has done on Charmides as the boy’s tutor. Tuozzo (2011) is good on this point.

23. E.g., his first two passes with Charmides reject conventional understandings as good definitions of *σωφροσύνη*.

tes.²⁴

[24] Have I moved too quickly? A possibility suggests itself. Although there are admittedly difficulties in finding evidence of ethical expertise, perhaps some indicators are available. Consider one tactic employed by Aristotle. He argues that a certain law is unjust on the grounds that it is “evidently destroying the city-state. But virtue certainly does not ruin what has it, nor is justice something capable of destroying a city-state. So it is clear, then, that this law cannot be just” (*Pol.* III.10, 1281a20).²⁵ If it is the case that there are certain facts about virtue that we can determine by considering the role that it is supposed to fill in human life, then we might be able to use those facts as evidentiary standards by which to test supposed ethical experts. If Socrates, like Aristotle, thinks that virtue leads to success, then can he take the success of the successful person as evidence of moral expertise? Perhaps his negative evaluation of Pericles in the *Gorgias* relies on such a thought. We know that Pericles was not an excellent statesman, Socrates argues, because if he had been an expert the city would not have turned on him. His failure shows that he was no ethical-political expert.

[25] But such a “survival test” for virtue fails. It could not possibly succeed under a theory, like Socrates’, that discounts *all* apparent or conventional goods as merely neutral, “neither good nor bad” in themselves. Socrates, no moral expert but the wisest in Athens, is executed. Are we to

24. See the *Protagoras* chapter. That dialogue is an extended demonstration of the point that reputation cannot be trusted. The point is standard Plato—the *dêmos* is the Great Sophist (*Republic* VI), the crowd cannot judge musical competitions well (*Laws* II).

25. Translations of the *Politics* are Reeve’s.

take his failure as evidence that he should not be emulated? We cannot know; Socrates insists that neither he nor any other ignorant person can know whether death will be good or bad (*Ap.* 39e–42a). In fact, to think that death *must* be bad (a necessary supposition for an argument like Aristotle’s) is precisely an instance of “the most blameworthy ignorance, [i.e.] to believe that one knows what one does not know” (*Ap.* 29ab). A “survival test,” then, will not do. No evidence is available by which those ignorant of good and bad could reliably identify ethical experts and expose ethical non-experts.²⁶ For ignorant of good and bad, they cannot know what counts as evidence of a good life.

1.3.3 Socratic Examination Also Fails

[26] We cannot arrive at knowledge of ethical knowledge either by direct examination or through the use of evidence. But perhaps there is a third way. Perhaps the moral non-expert could rely on Socratic interrogation to identify experts in the good and to expose frauds. This appears to be Socrates’ hope in the *Apology* as he goes about interviewing those thought wise (*Ap.* 21bc). And in the *Gorgias* Socrates implies that if only

26. Perhaps it is the case that Socrates’ commitments are not as stark as the *Charmides* might suggest. For example, in the *Gorgias* chapter I will argue that on the Socratic framework self-control is a necessary condition for virtue. If so, then could we use self-control as providing some evidence of virtue?

But such a hope will fail. For at best, this would (at least sometimes) license a negative conclusion, that a certain claimant to virtue is likely not an ethical expert. And this is valuable. But it could not license the positive conclusion, that we have in fact found an ethical expert.

This can be illustrated with Aristotle’s survival test: Aristotle identifies a necessary condition for a law being just, that it not destroy the city-state. But this is not a sufficient condition: it may be the case that a law that does not destroy the city-state is nevertheless unjust, just not unjust for *this* reason.

he had met the tyrant Archelaus he would be able to determine “how he stands in regard to education and justice” and so, whether he is happy (*Gorg.* 470de).²⁷ The *Charmides*, too, may suggest the ability to identify virtue through discussion: in the opening scene of the dialogue Socrates responds to suggestive comments about the beauty of Charmides’ body by announcing his intention to instead “undress” Charmides’ soul to see if it is in good shape (154e–155a and perhaps 159ab).

[27] How would Socratic interrogation provide a knowledge of ethical knowledge? We need not ask about every intricacy of Socratic method to see the general outline: Socrates questions a supposed moral expert attempting to expose an inconsistency in his interlocutor’s commitments and so, reveal a lack of knowledge. Over time, this practice may be able to separate non-knowers from knowers and so identify whatever moral experts exist.²⁸

[28] But although the Socratic approach may seem promising, it too will fail to provide knowledge of ethical knowledge. The approach encounters several difficulties, more or less challenging but all suggesting that Socrates does not have a reliable method by which to identify experts in good and bad.²⁹ The first difficulties for the Socratic approach, not fatal, are familiar roadblocks for dialectic. Consider 169cd of the

27. N.B., Socrates’ comment there should not be taken to entail a commitment to the sufficiency of virtue for happiness. For Archelaus enjoys all manner of conventional goods.

28. See Benson (2000).

29. The *Charmides*’ implied challenge to Socrates has not gone unnoticed. See e.g. McKim (1985), Benson (2003). Tuozzo (2011) and Kahn (1998) also have relevant comment.

Charmides, where Critias, finding himself at a loss and concerned for his reputation, sabotages the discussion. “He did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question,” Socrates comments, and so “he said nothing clear but concealed his predicament.” Socrates is forced to abandon the question “in order that our discussion should go forward.” But the question is never resolved, and in his closing speech (175a–176a) Socrates points to this failure (among others) as a major shortcoming of the discussion. Critias’ choice to obfuscate rather than engage shuts down the Socratic effort to assess his knowledge. Socratic interrogation has trouble achieving this objective in face of a difficult interlocutor.

[29] Perhaps this is a minor problem, at least for practical purposes. Some progress can still be made against difficult interlocutors,³⁰ and when a claimant to knowledge obscures or refuses to pursue discussion, the Socratic can safely act on the assumption of ignorance (if she manages to detect the avoidance). Better to assume ignorance, in any case, than to act on a false assumption of knowledge. Although the point seems obvious, it is worth noting—for the Socratic dialogues are full of characters all too ready to miss it, too ready to rashly plunge ahead on the basis of traditional authority or reputation or some other such dubious

30. So in the *Euthydemus* Socrates describes the sophists’ behavior as imitating “that Egyptian sophist Proteus” and encourages Ctessipus to join him and “imitate Menelaus and refuse to release the pair until they have shown us their serious side” (*Euthyd.* 288c). That they should continue in face of the brothers’ obstinance perhaps suggests that there is still some profit in the pursuit. (Incidentally, recall that Socrates also describes Ion as Proteus.)

claim.³¹

[30] A more serious problem for the attempt to identify moral experts through Socratic examination is the possibility that a claimant to knowledge might possess a consistent set of beliefs about the good that fails to rise to the status of knowledge.³² If Socrates' method relies on exposing inconsistency in his interlocutor's commitments, then an interlocutor with fully consistent beliefs would pass the test even if she lacked *knowledge* of good and bad. And even though true belief is as good as knowledge in guiding us to benefit in any particular instance, it is unreliable in the long run unless it is "tied down with an account of the reason why" (*Meno* 96d–98b). But the Socratic examiner will be unable to distinguish an interlocutor with a consistent set of beliefs about the good from an interlocutor with full knowledge of the good, at least so long as the interlocutor is hardy enough to keep hold of her beliefs when tested in argument. This is another way, then, in which Socratic interrogation fails to provide what Socrates hopes for.

31. For traditional authority, see Charmides in the closing scene of the dialogue (176). Socrates has just pointed out that neither he nor Critias has been able to successfully give an account of *sôphrosunê*. But when Critias announces that he would "take it as proof of [Charmides'] *sôphrosunê*" if Charmides were to act in a certain way, Charmides is ready to comply: he "would be acting wrongly if [he] failed to obey [Critias, his] guardian," he says. He even hints that he would be ready to employ violence in the attempt to carry out his (now revealed to be ignorant) guardian's commands.

For reputation, consider my treatment of the *Protagoras* in that chapter.

32. It may be the case (as e.g. Vlastos argues) that Socrates believes that any fully consistent set of beliefs would necessarily be a set of *true* beliefs (and so knowledge?). I take no position on this suggestion, and so cannot say for sure whether the possibility raised in the main text is a live one for Socrates. Here I only aim to raise the question; the subsequent concerns are of more immediate interest to me.

[31] But the most realistic worry for the Socratic approach is that the examiner may simply fail to detect an inconsistency that does exist in her interlocutor's commitments. The examiner may interrogate poorly or the claimant may be adept at discussion and so able to avoid making inconsistent claims or able to rescue herself once she sees an inconsistency.³³ For reasons such as these, then, it looks like inconsistent beliefs, just as consistent beliefs that fall short of knowledge, could often pass the Socratic test on any particular occasion.

[32] Socratic examination, then, will prove to be an unreliable method by which to find experts in good and bad. And while these difficulties may be more or less tractable, the most serious problem for the Socratic approach is intractable: Socrates aims to reveal ignorance, but failure to reveal ignorance never amounts to a positive certification of knowledge. Socrates can never be sure that he has found a real expert. The Socratic approach will always fail to provide a knowledge of ethical knowledge.

1.4 Socrates the Revolutionary?

[33] As we have seen, the *Charmides* denies that a person who does not herself possess the all-important "knowledge of good and bad" could have any reliable method by which to identify experts in ethical knowledge. Where does this leave us? Especially troubling about the *Charmides* argument may be its apparent political implication. Since Socrates considers political activity to be a task for experts, then he would suggest that

33. E.g., as Critias attempts to rescue himself from a difficulty with his rather Prodician speech at 162c–163e. See Brennan (2012) for some interesting discussion of that speech.

the Athenian practice of searching for experts to advise them on technical matters should be extended to ethical-political questions. But the argument that the ethical non-expert will never be able to reliably identify an ethical expert or distinguish her from a fraud blocks any such attempt: the Assembly, it seems, will never be able to recruit morally expert advisors even should it make the attempt.

[34] This argument amounts to a fundamental attack on democracy. Although it can be difficult to excavate the Athenian democratic ideology such as it was, one feature of it appears to have been a self-conscious reliance on the thought that the *dêmos*, composed of ordinary, non-expert citizens (*idiôtai*) was able (perhaps uniquely able) to select expert advisors for the polity.³⁴ In denying this ability, the *Charmides* undermines the foundation of democratic governance. And the challenge is not limited to the Athenian case: the same argument would target any system that allows moral non-experts a say in how their lives are arranged—even the limited say of whose advice to follow. There is a straight line from the *Charmides* to Kallipolis.

[35] And we see that the *Charmides*' attack on democracy is far from trivial. It is serious enough that Aristotle is forced to address it in defending even a limited role for ordinary citizens in the administration of the city.³⁵ In his celebrated argument about the supposed “wisdom of the

34. See Jones (1953) for a basic survey and Landauer (2012) generally for the conception of the *dêmos* as the unaccountable actor selecting advisors and holding them to account for their advice. See especially Landauer (2014) for the figure of the *idiôtês*.

35. The connection between the *Charmides* and this much-discussed passage in Aristotle has not received much (any?) comment in the literature. The idea is glanced at in passing in the *Gorgias* (455b) and Dodds (1959, 455b5)

crowd,” (*Pol.* III.11), Aristotle considers the claim that ordinary people, collectively, are capable judges and so capable of participating in politics by electing and inspecting officials. He initially concludes that, yes, “when they all come together their perception is adequate” (*Pol.* III.11, 1281b25–35)—but at this point he must respond to the *Charmides* argument.³⁶ It may be argued, he says, that only a person who can himself treat patients is able to judge “whether or not someone [else] has treated a patient correctly.” So “just as a doctor should be inspected by other doctors, so other [experts] should be inspected by their [expert] peers (*ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις*).”³⁷ And on the other end, “it might be held that election is the same way, since choosing correctly is also a task for experts”; for example, “choosing a ship’s captain is a task for expert captains.” If statecraft is a similar case, Aristotle says, then “the multitude should not be given authority over the election or inspection of officials.” Since Socrates thinks that virtue is just such a matter of expertise, the *Charmides* argument that non-experts cannot identify experts requires that ordinary citizens be completely barred from politics.

[36] It is not my purpose here to comment on Aristotle or how he attempts to answer the *Charmides* problem.³⁸ I only want to illustrate how

notes the connection to the *Charmides* and to Aristotle but provides no comment other than connecting the passages: “Cf. *Charm.* 171bc: it takes a doctor to judge the quality of another doctor; and Aristotle’s discussion of the question, *Pol.* 1282a7 ff.”

36. Aristotle does not mention Plato or Socrates or the *Charmides*, but the argument is the same.

37. To *ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις* compare the *τὸν αὐτοῦ ὁμότεχνον* at *Charmides* 171c.

38. Aristotle’s answer to the *Charmides* problem is interesting. One aspect of the effort is the suggestion that in many cases, anyone “with a general ed-

serious of a problem it is. Aristotle has hardly offered a ringing endorsement of the ability of the people. On the contrary, he has made what he views as a very limited concession to political stability.³⁹ But as he understands it, even this very limited role for the people would need to be removed if an argument like that of the *Charmides* were true.

[37] In considering the consequences of the argument that ordinary citizens will never be able to recognize a moral-political expert, Plato's more authoritarian fantasies creep in. Morally expert rulers will need to be "very bold doctors" because they "will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception" as a kind of "drug" to support their rule, since the subjects cannot be relied upon to follow the expert advice of their rulers, no matter how much it would benefit them to do so (*Rep.* V, 459).⁴⁰ Or Socrates' musing about how Kallipolis could be established

ucation in the craft" could be an adequate judge, and that "there are people of this sort in practically speaking all the crafts." This reminds the reader of Protagoras' answer to Socrates' challenge in that dialogue: the sophist suggests, more or less, that everyone has some minimal moral competence and that this minimal competence is all that is required to contribute to political deliberation. Some scholars might be tempted to attribute some such thought to Socrates. Kahn (1998, p. 200), for example, takes this tactic in speaking about a "fundamental distinction" between "moral" and "technical" knowledge. But this sits quite uncomfortably with Socrates' craft analogy and his general talk of virtue as a matter of technical expertise.

39. Just how limited of a concession this is is shown elsewhere, e.g. in Aristotle's praise of Solon for giving the people "only the minimum power necessary [to achieve political stability], that of electing and inspecting officials," and laments the fact that later demagogues expanded the power of the people (*Pol.* II.12).
40. Falsehood "is useful to people as a form of drug" to keep them from "attempting, through madness and ignorance, to do something bad" (*Rep.* II, 382d). But like all drugs, this one is dangerous and must only be administered by experts: "clearly we must allow only doctors to use it, not amateurs (*idiôtai*)" (*Rep.* III, 389b).

should “one or more true philosophers” come to power in a city:

They’ll send everyone in the city who is over ten years old into the country. Then they’ll take possession of the children, who are now free from the ethos of their parents, and bring them up in their own customs and laws, which are the ones we’ve described. This is the quickest and easiest way for the city and constitution we’ve discussed to be established, become happy, and bring the most benefit to the people among whom it’s established. (*Rep.* VII, 540e–541b)⁴¹

[38] Why should the moral expert take such drastic measures? Could she not instead attempt to persuade or teach her fellow-citizens? In some cases, perhaps. But circumstances may not allow it. Action guided by ignorance is harmful and it may be the case that it would be worse for the city and everyone in it, including the moral expert herself, to continue under the rule of ignorance.⁴² And if it is the case (as Plato usually suggests) that a corrupt environment interferes with or makes impossible efforts at morally salutary persuasion and that such an environment will tend over time toward greater and greater corruption,⁴³ then it may be true that no gentler option is available. The best the moral expert can do, if non-experts cannot or will not recognize and heed her expertise, might be to seize power in the city and attempt to forcibly cure her city of its affliction.

41. Cf. the similar “harsh purge” in order to arrive at the right “herd” of subjects that is discussed at *Laws* 735b–d.

42. Cf. the “greatest penalty” in *Rep.* I and the “bad master” of *Euthydemus 278–282.

43. See the chapters on the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*. Compare the *Laws* passage cited above or Plato’s lengthy discussions of the corrupting effects of bad culture in the *Republic*.

1.4.1 Critias and the Thirty

[39] As it turns out, Socrates' interlocutors—Plato's relatives⁴⁴—would later attempt just such an intervention in Athens. In 404/403, in the aftermath of the devastating Peloponnesian War, Critias led an oligarchical takeover of the city,⁴⁵ and Charmides served as a lieutenant to the regime. After the disastrous imperial adventures of the wartime democracy, the new government was a cause for some hope. As the author of the *Seventh Letter* says:⁴⁶

Some of these men happened to be relatives and acquaintances of mine, and they invited me to join them at once in what seemed to be a proper undertaking ... I thought that they were going to lead the city out of the unjust life she had been living and establish her in the path of justice, so that I watched them eagerly to see what they would do. But as I watched them they showed in a short time that the preceding constitution had been a precious thing. (*Ep.* 7, 324d)

And if we have some hesitation to accept such a positive initial evaluation from Plato, no friend to democracy and related to the oligarchs in question, let us hear from Lysias, as staunch a democrat as can be found:⁴⁷

44. Charmides was Plato's maternal uncle. Critias was Charmides' cousin.

45. See Krentz (1982) for a fine account of the Thirty. The Thirty is very much in the background of the *Charmides*. In the first scene of the dialogue, Socrates has just returned from battle at Potidaia, one of the opening clashes of the war. And the closing scene is infamous for its allusion to the Thirty—see e.g. Schofield (2008) for how this scene serves as a touchstone. Both Krentz and Tuozzo (2011) offer a more positive evaluation of Critias and of the initial attempt of the Thirty than is usually heard.

46. I take no position on the authenticity of the Letter.

47. Lysias' father is Cephalus and his brother Polemarchus, familiar from the

When the Thirty ... were established in the government, and declared that it was necessary to purge the city of unjust men and incline the rest of the citizens to virtue and justice, despite these professions they had the effrontery to discard them in practice. (Lysias 12.5)⁴⁸

[40] Although Plato and Lysias both point out that, in practice, things turned out badly with the Thirty, it is worth emphasizing that neither blames the oligarchy for its stated goal of seizing power to restore the city to justice, purging it of unjust men as necessary.⁴⁹ If anything, these texts suggest that the attempt was probably worth trying.⁵⁰

[41] This more optimistic picture of the Thirty fits easily with the *Charmides* as discussed so far. The suggestion has been that (at least in sufficiently bad circumstances) it may be the case that the best the moral expert can do is to seize power and resort to harsh measures in hopes of reforming the city. And at the close of the war, Athens certainly seemed to be badly off and Critias was not a terrible candidate for moral expertise: he was a respected intellectual (162b, 169c) and he is shown with a remarkable ability in conversation with Socrates. Nor is he displayed a villain like Callicles or Thrasymachus or merely power-hungry like Alcibiades. On the contrary, the portrait we have of Critias is one of

Republic. The family aided the democratic resistance to the Thirty and Polemarchus was killed by the regime (see Lysias 12).

48. Trans. Lamb, with some modifications.

49. As Krentz (1982, p. 60) points out, citing Xenophon 2.3.12, *Constitution of Athens* 35.3, Diodorus 14.4.2, and Lysias 25.19, one of the Thirty's first actions was to execute certain men with the reputation of being sycophants and others accused of taking bribes—and "the sources agree that these actions were generally well received."

50. See Krentz (1982, pp. 15–17) for the general setup.

a principled (if markedly aristocratic) intellectual who is genuinely concerned with the fate of his city (172a, c) and worried about the harmful influence of ignorance in politics (163bc, 173d).

[42] Moreover, Critias' positions in the dialogue do sound remarkably Platonic. *Sôphrosunê* is "minding one's own business," it is "to know oneself," the knowledge that secures happiness is the knowledge of good and bad. The first of these reflects a tradition of oligarchic rhetoric which calls on the *dêmos* to exercise "moderation" and accept the guidance of the wise upper class,⁵¹ a tradition reflected in the *Republic* in Plato's description of justice as each part of the city "minding its own business" and in his description of the *sôphrôn* city as one in which "the desires of the inferior many are controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few" and in which "the ruler and the ruled ... share the same belief about who should rule" (*Rep.* IV, 431).⁵² And Critias draws upon the same oligarchic rhetoric in his disparagement of "cobbling or selling salt fish or prostitution" as the same sort of vulgar pursuit while he elevates the admirable efforts of those with wisdom (164bc, 173de).

[43] As it happened, the Thirty at first undertook an oligarchical

51. Krentz (1982, p. 130) describes a stele commemorating the Thirty: "A personified Oligarchy was shown setting fire with a torch to Democracy. The epigram read: 'This memorial is for the good men who for a short time restrained the accursed Athenian people from arrogance [*hybris*].'"

52. Of course the shared belief in Kallipolis about who should rule is generated in large part by the rulers' lies and propaganda. But from the perspective of the *Charmides*, it seems that such devices may be necessary insofar as the ethically non-expert lower classes are unable to recognize the genuine wisdom of the philosopher-kings and the fact that the rule of philosophers is the best arrangement for each group in the city.

program of the sort that Plato may well have admired.⁵³ They disenfranchised the vast majority of Athenian citizens, leaving only some three thousand with voting rights. They then banned the excluded from living in the city, perhaps with the intention of diluting the influence of the poor.⁵⁴ They revoked certain legal rights that had been granted to foreigners. Such themes are familiar enough in Plato's work and he may well think of them as plausible means by which a philosophical ruler might hope to "lead the city out of the unjust life she had been living and establish her in the path of justice." All in all, then, the general plan and initial effort undertaken by Critias and the Thirty seem to fit quite well with the apparently autocratic inclination of the *Charmides*.

[44] Whatever initial promise the regime of the Thirty may have offered, however, this promise did not last for long. Faced with democratic resistance and internal pressure to expand the franchise, the oligarchs disarmed the populace, took unaccountable life-and-death power over all outside of the three thousand enfranchised citizens, and set about executing political enemies without trial.⁵⁵ They would kill some one thousand five hundred before their regime was overthrown.⁵⁶ But despite the fact that the Thirty's adventure in absolute power went badly, even though they "showed in a short time that the preceding constitution

53. See generally Krentz (1982, pp. 57–68).

54. N.B. that the "quickest and easiest" way to establish Kallipolis involves sending citizens out into the country, precisely what Critias and the Thirty did.

55. They began by excluding and executing Theramenes, who had been pushing to expand the franchise beyond the three thousand.

56. Details drawn from Krentz (1982, esp. pp. 74–83).

had been a precious thing,” the *Charmides* argument would certainly not speak against their general attempt. If anything, the argument would recommend it.

1.5 Testing Oneself

1.5.1 The Need for Self-Examination

[45] As we have seen, the argument of the *Charmides* raises a difficult political question. If it is impossible for non-experts in the knowledge of good and bad to reliably identify moral-political experts, then does the dialogue point toward an autocratic arrangement as the best regime? And given the thoroughgoing inability of ordinary citizens to recognize the ones who would best rule them, would the *Charmides* lend itself to the thought that (at least in some circumstances) the ethical expert should seize power and purge the city of troublesome elements, as Critias would later attempt in Athens, in pursuit of such an ideal political order?

[46] But we should not be too hasty here. Even if Socrates is seriously committed to the premises that suggest the possibility of autocratic politics, the *Charmides* poses a further problem that should cause the would-be autocrat to hesitate before undertaking any radical action in pursuit of such an arrangement. Call this new problem the problem of self-assurance, the first-person version of the third-person problem that we have been working with. Suppose that, after serious effort, the Socratic believes that she has hold of knowledge of what is good and bad. Does she then do whatever seems best to her? Not right away, at least. For given the importance of ethical knowledge, the Socratic would like to make sure that she knows what she is doing before undertaking any

drastic action. She must examine herself before she can trust herself with some disruptive endeavor, in the same way that she would want to examine others before entrusting them with a task. She would like to know that she *does*, in fact, know good and bad.

[47] The need for self-examination comes as no surprise. Socrates is famous for questioning his own knowledge (*Ap.* 38a).⁵⁷ It is “the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know” (*Ap.* 29b). And the *Charmides* itself is framed with the need for just such self-examination. The drug that Socrates claims to have to cure Charmides’ headache will be “no benefit” unless Charmides’ soul is in good shape. Before the boy takes the drug, then, he must first determine whether or not his soul is in good shape. He must first examine himself to see if he knows good and bad before he sets out in pursuit of “neither good nor bad” things like health of the body.⁵⁸

[48] But although Charmides’ own case is personal, the need for self-examination is also political. Socrates puts the argument to Callicles in the *Gorgias* at 514–515. If they were to undertake a public project involving building, Socrates says, he and Callicles would need to “examine and check ourselves closely first, to see if we are or are not experts in the building craft, and whom we’ve learned it from” (*Gorg.* 514b). Next, he continues, “we’d have to check whether we’ve ever built a work [of the same sort] in private business, for a friend of ours, say, or for ourselves, and whether this [work] is admirable or disgraceful.”

57. E.g., Rowe (2010), who gives a strong argument that Socratic examination is an examination of *knowledge*—as he puts it, the appropriate image is the philosophy tutorial, not the psychoanalyst’s couch.

58. Tuozzo (2001) has a helpful treatment of the Zalmoxian medicine speech.

[49] Socrates then applies this lesson to politics and knowledge of the good. If Callicles is about to enter politics, he must ask himself: “has Callicles ever improved any of the citizens? Is there anyone who was wicked before, unjust, undisciplined, and foolish ... who because of Callicles has turned out admirable and good?” (515a). Callicles—or Critias, Charmides, any other would-be autocrat who wants to enter politics—must first make sure that he has the relevant expertise, the knowledge of good and bad.⁵⁹ For unless he has this expert knowledge he can expect his political efforts to turn out badly both for the city and for himself. Even the moral expert requires self-assurance to underwrite drastic action. Lacking such self-assurance it is safer to assume oneself to be ignorant and to disavow radical action.⁶⁰ But this leaves a major question: does the *Charmides* allow for such self-assurance?

1.5.2 The Problem of Self-Assurance

[50] It is not generally recognized that the arguments about knowledge in the *Charmides* pose a problem of self-assurance. Christopher Rowe, for example, makes much of the *Charmides* in stressing the importance of self-examination but does not ask whether the dialogue’s argument against a knowledge of knowledge causes any trouble for the effort.⁶¹ Hugh Benson argues that the dialogue is strictly concerned with the third-person case of examining others and that it never considers the

59. This warning to would-be politicians is a favorite of Socrates’. See e.g. his handling of Alcibiades.

60. E.g., *Ap.* 29b, the closing speech of the *Laches*.

61. Rowe (2010).

case of a person testing her own claim to knowledge. He takes this to indicate that (on Plato and Socrates' view) self-examination is relatively unproblematic.⁶² Richard McKim takes it for granted that even the "ordinary knower" will have sure knowledge of what she knows without any need for some special knowledge of knowledge: "Socrates nowhere suggests the possibility that anyone could know something *without* knowing that he knows it."⁶³

[51] But these suggestions do not hold up; the *Charmides* is deeply concerned with the problem of self-assurance with regard to ethical knowledge. Let us take the case of the "ordinary knower" first, the person who knows good and bad but does not have, in addition, any special "knowledge of knowledge."⁶⁴ Is McKim correct? Would such an ordinary ethical knower unproblematically know that she has ethical knowledge?

[52] Socrates' presentation of knowledge of knowledge gives us reason to doubt that one's own ethical knowledge could be so easily verified. He assures Critias that he is "continually investigating in your company whatever is put forward" (165bc), "fearing lest ever I unknowingly suppose I know something when I do not" (166d). And later, Socrates regrets

62. Benson (2003, p. 38 n. 18): "No argument is ever promulgated in the *Charmides* to the effect that an individual with knowledge of F-ness and knowledge of knowledge cannot know that he or she has knowledge of F-ness." And Benson (2003, p. 42): "We are clearly concerned with a Socratic knower of knowledge. We are concerned whether it is possible for an individual who, like Socrates, has disavowed all other knowledge to possess knowledge of knowledge."

63. McKim (1985, p. 68).

64. If indeed these are separable. It will probably be the case that part of knowing what is good and bad for human beings will be knowing something about moral knowledge itself. But for the sake of the illustration let us suppose it possible that there should be an "ordinary" ethical knower.

that no knowledge of knowledge has appeared by which to distinguish “the doctor who knows the particulars of his art from the one who does not know them but pretends *or supposes* that he does” (171c, emphasis added). Socrates is not only worried about charlatans attempting to deliberately deceive us. He is also worried about well-intentioned medical amateurs who mistake their own opinions for expertise. This language weighs against the suggestion that any “ordinary knower” will unproblematically know that she knows what she knows. For if the experience of *knowing* something were so easily distinguished from the experience of *supposing* that one knows something, then Socrates’ worry here would be unfounded. It is at least not the obvious interpretation of these lines to think that self-assurance is so readily available to the ordinary knower.

[53] Here Benson’s suggestion comes into play. He argues that the dialogue carefully keeps itself to considering the “Socratic” figure who makes no claim to knowledge at all but only attempts to test others. Because Socrates never “supposes” he knows anything, then his reassurance to Critias is just empty talk and should not be taken as evidence of a problem of self-assurance. Someone with some knowledge of knowledge who (unlike Socrates) *does* know (and supposes that she knows) something will have no real trouble verifying her knowledge. To support this case, it could be pointed out that I have elided the first quotation in the previous paragraph: Socrates assures Critias that he is “continually investigating in your company whatever is put forward *because of the fact that I myself do not know*” (165bc, emphasis added). It would seem, then, that no problem of self-assurance is evident in the *Charmides*.

[54] But on the contrary, the dialogue *does* consider the problem of self-assurance for the figure who claims some knowledge. Though *Socra-*

tes may be careful about disclaiming expertise, not everyone will be—as Socrates’ steady parade of mistaken interlocutors attests. Let us look again at Socrates’ second assurance to Critias, which amounts to a piece of advice to anyone claiming knowledge. Socrates admonishes Critias for supposing that he conducts the refutation “for any other reason than the reason for which I *would* thoroughly examine something I myself say, fearing lest ever I unknowingly suppose that I know something when I do not” (166d; emphasis added). With the “would,” Socrates here casts himself in the counterfactual, “un-Socratic” position of making a claim to knowledge, and he tells us just how he would act in that case.⁶⁵ In this Socratic prescription for whomever would claim knowledge, we see a clear worry about the problem of self-assurance: for, again, if the experience of *knowing* something were easily distinguished from the experience of *supposing* that one knows something, then Socrates’ worry would be unfounded. So we must read the *Charmides* as including this case, of the “un-Socratic” claim to knowledge, in its concern.

[55] If the *Charmides* does indeed raise the problem of self-assurance while also denying the possibility of a knowledge of ethical knowledge, then is self-assurance of ethical knowledge possible? It is true that we do have reason to think that the first-person case *might* be more straightforward or unproblematic than the third-person case. This insofar as the Socratic seeking to examine herself can avoid problems like deliberately deceptive interlocutors that vex the third-person case: to whatever extent Socrates would deny a psychological analogy to the deliberately de-

65. ἄλλου τινὸς ἔνεκα ἀλέγχειν ἢ οὐπὲρ ἔνεκα κἂν ἑμαυτὸν διερευνώμενη τί λέγω, φοβούμενος μή ποτε λάθω οἰόμενος μὲν τι εἰδέναι, εἰδὼς δὲ μή. The κἂν highlights the counterfactual.

ceptive interlocutor, self-examination will be favorably distinct from the examination of others (though we could of course still make a mistake in the assessment).⁶⁶

[56] Ultimately, the same feature of the *Charmides* argument that makes it impossible to verify others' claims to ethical knowledge will make self-assurance of moral knowledge similarly impossible. Consider: when I seek to verify my own opinions, I stand in relation to myself just as the ignorant person does in relation to the proclaimed expert. I cannot use my medical opinions, say, to verify the veracity of my medical opinions. That would be absurd! Now, it is true that I could verify my medical opinions by asking whether I had reliably managed to produce health in my patients or by asking someone known to have successfully practiced medicine to examine me. But the same is not available in the case of ethical knowledge.

[57] Although Benson is correct that the argument against the possibility of knowledge of knowledge is stated in third-person terms, this fact does nothing to avoid the problem for the first-person case. It is not incidental, it turns out, that the knowledge of knowledge for which Socrates and Critias hope is consistently presented as enabling self-examination in addition to the examination of others. For the same challenges that afflict our examination of others' claims to ethical knowledge also make

66. Though this chapter largely avoids psychology, it is worth pointing out the question of whether Plato and Socrates would believe self-deception to be possible. The clearest mention of self-deception in Plato that I am aware of comes from a much later text, *Cratylus* 428d: "self-deception is the worst of all things" (τὸ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι αὐτὸν ὑφ' αὐτοῦ). (It may also be worth pointing out that *Republic* 382 does not say anything about "lying to oneself"; many translations, including Grube/Reeve and Bloom, are misleading there.)

self-examination of moral knowledge impossible. No one, it seems—not Socrates, not Critias, not even someone with full knowledge of the good—, could ever pass the Socratic test and confidently undertake such drastic political action as the *Charmides* argument may at first suggest.

1.6 A Political Aporia?

[58] The *Charmides*' claims about "knowledge of knowledge," and what these claims might imply for Socratic politics, are difficult to sort out. As I have shown, the dialogue (§2) leaves open the possibility that some knowledge of productive craft knowledges may be available while (§3) ruling out the possibility of a knowledge of ethical knowledge. When applied to politics, this conclusion (§4) appears to lend itself to a call for radical political action aiming to establish a philosophical-authoritarian regime—and it is worth noting that the argument is not incompatible with what Socrates' interlocutors would in fact attempt in Athens. But considering how badly the regime of the Thirty turned out in practice, I have shown (§5) that, contrary to what some scholars have thought, the dialogue's worries about knowing knowledge apply to the first-person case of testing one's own supposed expertise just as well as they apply to the third-person case of testing someone else. This recognition should instill the would-be philosophical-authoritarian with a healthy skepticism of her own expertise and serve as a caution against radical political action.

[59] Taken together, these arguments leave Socrates in a familiar position. In fact, we can see that they form an important part of the set of reasons that support Socrates' well-known habits. Even on the stark-

est picture of Socrates' commitments about virtue as expert knowledge, we might say, the *Charmides* produces an argument for acting Socratically, in all of the usual ways. For, unable to reliably identify moral expertise in oneself or in others, Socrates concludes that he is best off adopting a cautious stance and assuming moral ignorance. This conclusion is based on his fundamental that a person "should look only to this in his actions, whether what he does is right or wrong" (*Ap.* 28bc). Better, Socrates thinks, to assume ignorance and not to act than to act badly and so make ourselves miserable (*Euthd.* 281bc).⁶⁷

[60] But here we might hesitate. For the skepticism of the *Charmides* seems to be so strong as to threaten Socrates with a *complete* aporia when it comes to ethics and politics. If we can never be sure of our ethical knowledge, then how is *any* action licensed? And will *any* political arrangement escape the danger of ignorant rulers who falsely suppose that they know what is best? Consider the opening scene of the dialogue. In a short couple of pages, the aristocratic oligarch Critias and the arch-democrat Chaerephon are both shown to make the very same mistake, missing the fundamental value of wisdom. The message is plain enough: all political ideals of Socrates' day simply miss the point, failing to account for the one thing that would truly make human life go well. But in light of the strong skepticism that the *Charmides* goes on to express, are we to think that the message is even stronger than that—that *no* political ideal could do much for human beings?

67. Cf. *Apology* 32d, *Crito* 49cd. This Socratic tenet, that "doing what's unjust is actually the worst thing there is" for a person (*Gorg.* 469b) also supports Socrates' usual deference to traditional authority and is the subject of the following chapter, on the *Gorgias*.

[61] While a full answer to this puzzle is beyond the scope of this chapter, I do want to suggest that the aporia is not as complete as it may at first seem. The problem of self-assurance does not render ethical and political reflection completely fruitless. At the very least, so long as Socrates believes that we can at least come to an answer on *procedural* questions, questions about the methods and contexts that will best support the pursuit of ethical knowledge and that will make it more rather than less likely that our affairs will be guided by wisdom, then he will have the material for some surprisingly robust practical argument about ethics and politics. And Socrates does seem to have confidence in such efforts. His habitual practice must be based on such considerations,⁶⁸ and when it comes to politics I suggest that we see the same. For example, the *Charmides* does leave intact the possibility that (at least sometimes, in some circumstances, with effort) we might be able to conclude that a would-be ruler, like Critias, is not as wise as he believes himself to be. Following this line of thought, Socrates may be able to conclude that some political systems will offer genuinely better hope than others either in selecting the best available candidates for rule, or at least in doing a better job of ruling out bad candidates.⁶⁹

[62] And, of course, the *Charmides* does come to at least one solid political conclusion through precisely such procedural reflection: that given

68. He does not, in the *Charmides*, give up on his firm belief that his habits are the best way he knows for human beings to care for themselves: “I think I am making a fool of myself,” he says, “but all the same it is necessary to examine whatever occurs to us and not to proceed at random, if we are going to have the least bit of care for ourselves” (173a).

69. In fact, many of the examinations the youth undergo in Kallipolis are designed to rule out poor candidates for rule.

the problem of self-assurance, when it comes to political action we must reject radical adventurism. Revolution is ruled out, no matter how confident one is in one's ethical expertise. This leaves the Socratic to conclude that we must make whatever progress we can in the context in which we find ourselves embedded, cautious of taking ourselves so seriously as to seek the overthrow of settled and legitimate sources of authority. In this manner, Socrates appears as a practical paradigm for how one might best pursue happiness in the world as one finds it.

[63] But we should also be careful not to overstate the implication of the anti-revolutionary conclusion. For the Socratic stance of deference and the rejection of political adventurism as a *means* is quite compatible with the hope for an *end* that is radically different than the political world as it is. While the *Charmides* rules out revolution, it says nothing to rule out quite radical ideas of where we might want politics to go; it only cautions about how we might hope to get there.⁷⁰

[64] Now, the arguments of this chapter have confined themselves to the starkest picture of the Socratic commitment to virtue as expert knowledge of good and bad. And in examining the arguments of the *Charmides* we have come to something of a political aporia. But the dialogue does make some progress in political argument. For example, it poses a fundamental challenge to democracy while ruling out rev-

70. And this is quite in keeping with what we find elsewhere in Plato. In the *Republic*, political revolution is similarly ruled out and any hope of how the best regime might come into being is placed on the vanishingly unlikely chance that genuine philosophers should stumble into power through conventionally legitimate means and then take advantage of it or, conversely, that rulers should somehow take up genuine philosophy. And in the *Laws*, the proposal is to solve the problem of origin by looking for an opportunity to found a new colony, to begin with a blank slate.

olutionary action. So we are left to wonder whether elsewhere in the Socratic dialogues we might find other considerations that would also weigh against democracy, or other arguments that might suggest what Socrates might take to be a better (or even the best) political arrangement. The following two chapters work out some such thoughts and show how they lead Socrates and Plato, even in light of the problem of self-assurance, to a definite political conclusion: that the best hope for human beings lies in the rule of self-controlled philosopher-aristocrats and the corresponding rejection of political and cultural freedom. But what we have found in the *Charmides* will not be discarded. Plato and Socrates' respect for existing law and traditional authority (even when this is coupled with sharp criticism) remains constant, as does the critical stance towards one's own pretensions to knowledge. The *Charmides*, while not offering the full story of Socratic politics, does advance several key arguments that must be incorporated into any attempt to understand the whole of Plato's early work.

2 | Why is the Tyrant Unhappy? Plato's *Gorgias* on the Futility of Vice

2.1 The Successful Tyrant

[1] About a third of the way through Plato's *Gorgias*,¹ Socrates insists on a claim that strikes his interlocutor Polus as astonishing, even laughable: that the tyrant, the paradigmatic example of power and wealth enjoyed in wickedness, is not happy.² Unsurprisingly, Polus is incredulous—surely “many people who behave unjustly are happy (εὐδαίμονες)!” (470d)—but Socrates persists in his claim that anyone who is unjust and wicked, no matter how much power she enjoys, will in fact be wretched and miserable (ἄθλιος, 470e).³

-
1. Quotations and citations to Plato refer to the *Gorgias* unless otherwise noted. Quotations from the *Gorgias* mostly use the Zeyl translation (Cooper, 1997), with occasional modification or substitution of my own translations. I will try to point out the places where my interpretation of the Greek departs significantly from Zeyl's. The Greek text is Dodds (1959).
 2. The figure of the tyrant is used throughout in the paradigmatic sense. Socrates' argument is not confined to claims about actual political tyranny; the argument is a general one about power and wrongdoing.
 3. The *Gorgias* sets up εὐδαιμονία and the person who is εὐδαίμων in persistent opposition to ἀθλιότης and the person who is ἄθλιος. The opposition is also found in the clearest treatments of Socrates' craft analogy, in the *Meno* (at 78a) and *Euthydemus* (at 281c, 280d). The prevalence of the language in the *Gorgias* suggests what this chapter will demonstrate, that we need

[2] Now, this is a very strong claim. For it does not rest on some notion that the wrongdoer will be miserable insofar as she is liable to fail in her efforts or to be caught and punished afterward. Quite the contrary: Socrates maintains that even the successful wrongdoer will nevertheless be miserable, and that she will be all the more miserable because of her apparent success. While Polus takes it as obvious that many wrongdoers are happy and adduces the contemporary example of the tyrant Archelaus, who murdered his way to the throne (470d),⁴ Socrates sets himself against this common view and insists that “doing what’s unjust is actually the worst thing there is” (469b) and that anyone who is unjust is miserable, even if apparently successful in wickedness.

[3] Socrates aims to take the hard case, then, and sets his sights on the *successful* wrongdoer, aiming to show how such a person is nevertheless miserable.⁵ And he only makes his case harder. If it were neces-

to read the *Gorgias* to see Socrates working out thoughts about happiness and misery that are implicit in his ethical theory throughout the Socratic dialogues.

4. Polus also mentions the more usual example of the Great King, who, as Dodds puts it, “embodies the popular ideal of supreme *εὐδαιμονία*” (Dodds, 1959, *ad loc.*). Dodds also has interesting comment on Plato’s choice of Archelaus as the primary example.
5. Socrates’ interest in arguing the hard case explains something odd about the *Gorgias*: that Socrates never challenges the rhetoricians’ increasingly grandiose claims for the great ability of rhetoric. One natural response to claims that the orator is like a “tyrant” and has everyone else as his “slave” is to suggest that this is overclaiming a bit. Consider Dodds’s reaction to Socrates’ comment that the power of rhetoric seems “supernatural”: “comparison with the *Protagoras* suggests that Gorgias is here exaggerating a good deal (and that Plato knows it),” citing *Protagoras* 319b5 and *Alcibiades I* 107a–c (Dodds, 1959, 455d6–456c6). But Socrates never shows any interest in such deflationary arguments in the *Gorgias*, instead going to work on the “supernaturally” effective rhetoric rather than spending any time with the sort of argument that would quibble over just how effective

sary for a person to take revenge upon an enemy, he says, then rather than pressing charges and working to convict his enemy in court, the rhetorician should try instead to help his enemy escape—for the wrongdoer who gets away with his crime is all the more miserable for it. At the furthest extreme, “if [his enemy’s] crimes merit the death penalty, he should scheme to keep him from being executed, preferably never to die at all but to live forever in corruption—failing that, to have him live as long as possible in that condition” (481ab). This is an incredibly strong claim that Socrates has taken on. We might describe it as a claim that the wrongdoer who is *universally successful* in her wrongdoing, the person who aims at injustice and accomplishes every single thing she has in mind and never suffers any reprisal or punishment for her crimes, does not attain happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) but rather is wretched and miserable (*ἄθλιος*)—and all the more miserable if she even lives forever! Call this the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant.⁶

[4] To emphasize just how important this challenge is, we can notice that it functions in the *Gorgias* in precisely the same way as the Ring of

rhetoric is likely to be in fact.

We might say that such deflationary tactics are, from Socrates’ perspective, rather beside the point. What really matters, he might think, is showing that the dream expressed in the tyrannical ideal is a rotten one—that even if the orator achieves all the tyrannicizing power that he so fondly desires, even if he is *completely successful*, such “success” will only be bad for him. Socrates is not interested in merely deflating the pretensions of rhetoric—he wants to wholly uproot the implicit argument about happiness that their tyrannical dreams express.

6. So, “Successful Tyrant” will stand as shorthand for: the wicked person universally successful in her every endeavor who never suffers punishment or reciprocal harm, and who even lives forever.

Gyges challenge functions in the *Republic*.⁷ Socrates' attempt to answer it, then, deserves the same level of attention, for the question of what makes human beings happy or miserable lies at the very heart of Greek ethics and politics.

[5] We can note that the claim that doing wrong makes one miserable plays a fundamental role in Socrates' ethical theory. For the most direct example, it is this claim that explains the fundamental ethical exhortation that we see Socrates pressing on his interlocutors throughout the Socratic dialogues: that one ought never do wrong.⁸ The reasoning is prudential: if it is the case, as Socrates maintains, that the wrongdoer will be "thoroughly miserable" (472e), then Socrates can draw the conclusion that "what a man should guard himself against most of all is doing what's unjust" (478c). Call this Socrates' counsel against wrongdoing. On this view, wrongdoing is fundamentally self-defeating: the wrongdoer believes that by doing wrong she will attain happiness, but in fact her action will produce the opposite.⁹

7. Thanks to Matt Landauer for bringing the parallel to my attention.

8. E.g., in the *Apology* Socrates maintains that a person "should look only to this in his actions, whether what he does is right or wrong, whether he is acting like a good or bad man" (*Ap.* 28bc). See also, e.g., *Apology* 32d, *Crito* 49cd.

9. For another example of the importance of the claim that the wrongdoer will be miserable, consider how it plays into Socrates' argument that nobody ever does wrong willingly (i.e., in full knowledge of the nature and consequences of his action). The structure of Socrates' argument, such as it is, in favor of this paradoxical claims combines: (A) the claim that doing wrong is never in one's overall best interest and (B) the claim of motivational intellectualism, or the belief that every action follows the agent's in-the-moment all-things-considered judgment about what is in her overall best interest. As expressed, e.g., at *Protagoras* 358d. See Brickhouse and Smith (2010, pp. 50–51). The claim of motivational intellectualism can

[6] So if we wish to explain Socratic ethics and politics, we must explain his answer to the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant. And it can be noted up front that Socrates' commitment to this strong Challenge puts the lie to interpretations of his counsel against wrongdoing that focus (primarily or exclusively) on the prospect of failure or reprisal; such attempts merely dodge the question.¹⁰ If we hope to explain Socratic ethics and politics, then, we must explain Socrates' belief that even the *universally* successful wrongdoer, who never fails in her efforts or suffers reprisal for her crimes will nevertheless be wretched and miserable.¹¹ This is an extraordinarily counterintuitive claim. So how does Socrates argue it out?

also be phrased as the denial that the phenomenon of synchronic akrasia is possible.

10. As Reshotko (2006, pp. 65–72). Also (to varying degrees) Brickhouse and Smith (2010), Moss (2007).
11. It is worth noting one nuance that I pass over for lack of space: one significant aspect of Socrates' claim that the wrongdoer is *ἄθλιος* is better expressed as the claim that the wrongdoer is "wretched," a poor specimen of humanity, insofar as it is not the rational part of her soul but the appetitive part that is in control of her deliberations and sets the agenda for her life. But while such an idea of inner autonomy or freedom is an important part of Plato's final argument against wrongdoing and in favor of the disciplined life, it does not erase the other side of Socrates' case: that the wrongdoer is, in addition, *miserable* in a straightforward sense (as will be shown over the course of the chapter). Accordingly, though a complete description of Socrates' commitment would be that the wrongdoer is "wretched and miserable," I will focus on explaining the question of misery.

This focus is justified (1) by the relative neglect in the literature of this Socratic thought and (2) because these are the arguments that would speak to or motivate certain Socratic interlocutors, such as the committed hedonist or the committed democrat, who could comfortably reject the sort of value claim that might go into the other sense of *ἀθλιότης*: you want to achieve a happiness that requires contentment, Socrates might say, but you will never achieve that end the way that you are going about it.

[7] In brief, what I demonstrate is that, just as the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant serves as a first draft of the Ring of Gyges, Socrates' claim that wrongdoing makes the wrongdoer miserable rests on a theory of appetite and psychological self-harm that anticipates the more elaborate theory of the *Republic*. Wrongdoing will shape the wrongdoer's psyche in such a way as to lead to perpetual dissatisfaction and anxiety; this is why even the successful wrongdoer will be miserable.

2.2 A Puzzle: Health of the Soul

[8] So how does Socrates in the *Gorgias* respond to the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant? Over the course of Socrates' conversation with Polus, a peculiar sort of answer emerges: the successful tyrant is miserable because she lives with an unhealthy soul.¹² But what are we to make of this obscure thought? Although the bare claim comes out in the Polus conversation, it is there left underspecified and underexplained; we must work through Socrates' encounter with Callicles to try to puzzle out just what he might mean by "health of the soul" and how exactly we should understand his claim that the person who lives with an unhealthy soul is miserable (*ἄθλιος*).

[9] To begin, let us see how talk of health of the soul comes up in the *Gorgias*. The language emerges out of Socrates' quarter scheme of pandering and beneficent practices (463a–465a). There Socrates distinguishes four crafts that care for the good of human beings. Gymnastics and medicine aim at the good state of the body while the legislative and

12. *ψυχή*: "mind", "soul", "psyche." I will use "soul."

judicial arts, together comprising what Socrates calls “politics,” similarly aim at the good state of the soul. Opposed to each beneficent craft is a pandering practice (*κολακεία*) that does not aim at or consider what is best for its object but only pursues “whatever’s most pleasant at the moment” (464d).

[10] As the conversation with Polus continues, the thought of a good state of the soul analogous to health of the body comes to have a central place in Socrates’ response to Polus’ dreams of tyranny (477a–481b). Polus admires those who do wrong and escape punishment or discipline, while Socrates insists that just as medical treatment alleviates a badness (*κακόν*) of the body that makes the unhealthy person miserable, so properly administered discipline removes “some monstrously great harm and astounding badness” from the soul (477e), and a badness that is much worse than the bad state of the body. Accordingly, the wrongdoers admired by Polus, who do anything to avoid being disciplined, are like those who are irrationally afraid of painful medical treatment:

They look at its painfulness, but are blind to its benefit and are ignorant of how much more miserable (*ἄθλιώτερον*) it is to live with an unhealthy soul than with an unhealthy body, a soul that’s rotten with injustice and impiety. This is also the reason they go to any length to avoid paying what is due and getting rid of the worst thing there is. (479bc)

But this is foolishness, Socrates insists. Rather, one who deserves discipline “should go to the judge as though he were going to a doctor, anxious that the disease of injustice shouldn’t be protracted and cause his soul to fester incurably” (480ab).

[11] The upshot of Socrates’ conversation with Polus, then, is the claim that “the person who’s unjust and wicked is miserable (*ἄθλιος*)”

(470e) because wrongdoing causes the soul to contract the “disease of injustice” (478c)—and that living with this “disease” makes for a life even more miserable than the life of the person afflicted with chronic physical illness.¹³ And so, Socrates draws his standard moral injunction: that “what a man should guard himself against most of all is doing what’s unjust” (478c).¹⁴

[12] And as the dialogue turns to the conversation with Callicles, Socrates continues to lean heavily on the language of health of the soul. Consider only one example, the striking image of the modest ship pilot at 511e–512b.¹⁵ In this passage, Socrates is urging Callicles to affirm that there is more to living well than mere survival, and that “one who is truly a man should stop thinking about how long he will live ... [but

13. Socrates’ claim that the life of the unjust person who escapes discipline is more miserable (*ἀθλιώτερον*) than the life of the chronically ill person should *not* be understood as a claim that such a life is *more painful* (477de). This will be relevant when we turn to the Callicles conversation, where Socrates engages more explicitly with a(n inconsistently) hedonistic picture of the tyrannical ideal. But I should note in advance that just because Socrates does not believe that the unjust life is *more* painful than the unhealthy life, this does not commit him to the claim that the unjust life is *not painful at all*. As we see in his conversation with Callicles, Socrates is committed to two claims with regard to injustice: (1) that it is a painful life that any clear-thinking hedonist would reject; (2) that it is a *shameful* life that anyone thinking clearly who is *not* a fully committed hedonist would also reject. The character of its “painfulness” may not be the same as the character of acute bodily pain, but painfulness is a significant component of the judgment that the unjust life is a life of misery (*ἀθλιότης*)—we decidedly should *not* interpret the misery of the wrongdoer as having *nothing* to do with painfulness.

14. Cf. 527b, 522cd; *Apology* 32d as well as 30d and 39b; the *Crito* passage quoted below.

15. Other examples: the analogy is especially prominent at 499b–501b (which picks up on the need for knowledge), and is also evident in the myth of judgment that concludes the dialogue (524b–525a), which describes the thoroughly unjust person as having “nothing healthy (*ὕγιές*) about his soul.”

should instead] give consideration to how he might live the part of his life still before him as well as possible” (512e–513a).¹⁶ Socrates imagines an expert pilot who safely conveys his passengers to their destination, but who is modest enough to realize that it is not clear which of his passengers he has benefitted:

He concludes that if a man afflicted with serious incurable physical diseases did not drown, this man is miserable (ἄθλιος) for not dying and has gotten no benefit from him. But if a man has many incurable diseases in that which is more valuable than his body (ἐν τῷ τοῦ σώματος τιμωτέρῳ), his soul, life for that man is not worth living (τούτῳ [οὐκ] βιωτέον), and he won’t do him any favor if he rescues him from the sea or from prison or from anywhere else. He knows that for a corrupt person it’s better not to be alive, for he necessarily lives badly (οὐκ ἄμεινόν ἐστιν ζῆν τῷ μοχθηρῷ ἀνθρώπῳ· κακῶς γὰρ ἀνάγκη ἐστὶν ζῆν). (511e–512b)

[13] So we see that Socrates’ main response to the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant in the *Gorgias* relies on an obscure analogy: injustice is a disease upon the soul, and just as it is miserable to live with an unhealthy body, so it must be miserable to live with a soul that is in bad shape. This language emerges in Socrates’ conversation with Polus and it continues to characterize his ethical exhortation that one ought never do wrong throughout his conversation with Callicles.

[14] And it is important to note that this analogy between health of the body and health of the soul is not unique to the *Gorgias*. On the contrary, Plato uses such language throughout the Socratic dialogues to describe Socrates’ commitments. Consider, for example, *Crito* 47a–48d.

16. “One who is truly a man” (τόν γε ὡς ἀληθῶς ἄνδρα) responds to Callicles’ gendered rhetoric at, e.g., 484c–486d. On the general exhortation, cf. *Apology* 28b–d.

Here Socrates argues that, just as we must follow the advice of trainers and doctors when it comes to bodily health, so we must follow the advice of the expert (if one can be found) when it comes to “that part of ourselves that is improved by just actions and destroyed by unjust actions.” He draws the analogy in language that is strikingly parallel to the language of the *Gorgias* quoted above:

SOCRATES: And is life worth living with a body that is corrupted and in bad condition? (*ἀρ’ οὖν βιωτὸν ἡμῖν ἐστὶν μετὰ μοχθηροῦ καὶ διεφθαρμένου σώματος;*)

CRITO: In no way.

SOCRATES: And is life worth living for us with that part of us corrupted (*διεφθαρμένου*) that unjust action harms and just action benefits? Or do we believe that that part of us—whatever it is—that is concerned with justice and injustice, is inferior (*φαιλότερον*) to the body?

CRITO: Not at all.

SOCRATES: It is more valuable (*τιμιώτερον*)?

CRITO: *Much* more. (*Crito* 47e–48a)

[15] The analogy between bodily health and health of the soul is widespread in the Socratic dialogues¹⁷ and that it is supposed to support Socrates’ counsel against wrongdoing.¹⁸ But here we have to stop and wonder: just how is this odd analogy supposed to be plausible? What does Socrates *mean* when he talks about “health of the soul,” how does acting wrongly injure this health, and how are we to understand the supposed misery (*ἀθλιότης*) of living with an unhealthy soul? We have to

17. And, of course, in the *Republic*.

18. For other examples of the analogy in the Socratic dialogues, consider *Protagoras* 313ab and *Apology* 30ab. The latter contains some seemingly ambiguous language; for detailed argument in favor of the correct interpretation (and for an excellent summary overview of the demotion of external goods in the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle) see Burnyeat (2003).

look for an explanation and defense of the analogy; simple assertion will hardly serve in place of argument to show how and why the wrongdoer is miserable—we have to try to get behind the language to the thought it expresses. But although the health of soul analogy is given central place in Socrates' conversation with Polus, it is there left woefully underspecified;¹⁹ we must turn to Socrates' encounter with Callicles to see what we can puzzle out of it. And this work is not only necessary for arriving at a plausible understanding of the *Gorgias*, but it is also necessary if we hope to arrive at a general interpretation of Socratic ethics and politics.²⁰

19. We do get a list of traditional vices as *descriptions* of the unhealthy soul. It is characterized by “injustice”, “indiscipline” (*ἀκολασία*), “cowardice”, “impiety”, and “ignorance” (477b–e, “impiety” added at 479c). The dialogue tends to focus on injustice and indiscipline as the primary characteristics: see the artful way in which Plato delays the introduction of *ἀκολασία* in the first passage that connects acting wrongly and damaging one's soul (477b–e), before dropping out the other terms to focus on injustice and indiscipline—and how from that point onward these twin qualities dominate descriptions of the unhealthy soul. But, of course, none of this serves as much of an explanation or defense of the strong claims that Socrates wants to hang on the analogy.

20. We can set aside one possible interpretation of Socrates' argument. Although the *Gorgias* concludes with a myth of afterlife judgment, Socrates' claim cannot be that wrongdoing makes one miserable insofar as the wrongdoer will meet with punishment after death. For whatever Socrates may make of the wrongdoer's prospects in the afterlife, he never gives up on his insistence that the wrongdoer will be miserable in *this* life. The life of the wrongdoer is “not worth living for him ... for he necessarily lives badly” (512ab). And even the *immortal* tyrant is made miserable by her wrongdoing (481ab). And the dialogue closes with his exhortation to Callicles the life that is best “both in life and in death” (527e). So we cannot avoid the puzzle of trying to explain how Socrates believes it miserable to *live* with an unhealthy soul in this mortal life.

This point, while hardly in need of additional support, is bolstered by Sedley (2009)'s insightful suggestion that the inversion that Socrates uses to kick off the Myth of the Water Carriers—“Perhaps in reality we're dead. Once I even heard one of the wise men say that we are now dead and that our bodies are our tombs” (493a)—should carry over and prime us to read

2.3 The Disordered Soul

[16] We can now turn to examine Socrates' conversation with Callicles in more detail. In what follows, I show that Socrates' claim that the wrongdoer will be miserable, expressed in the health of soul analogy, works out as a claim about undisciplined appetite and psychological self-harm that anticipates the more elaborate theory of the *Republic*. I then draw some consequences for our understanding of Socratic ethics and politics.

2.3.1 How Ought We Live?

[17] Callicles enters the conversation with a vehement outburst, wondering how on earth Socrates could be serious—if what Socrates says is true, then “won’t this human life of ours be turned upside down, and won’t everything we do evidently be the opposite of what we should do?” (481c). He continues with a long speech (482c–486d) in which he sets out his idea of what is naturally right and urges Socrates to give up philosophy in favor of rhetorical and political pursuits.²¹

the closing Myth of Judgment, too, as containing an argument about mortal life.

21. What is at stake in the Callicles conversation? One way of reading the conversation might adopt Callicles' framework and focus on the choice of lives, on the value of the “quiet” philosophical life as compared to the “active” political life. But this is slightly misleading. As it works out in the *Gorgias*, what is at stake between Socrates and Callicles is more precisely expressed as: the value (if any) of (more or less) conventional norms of justice and self-control (rule-following and restraint of appetite). Ultimately, this becomes the question of how we ought to relate to ourselves and to our appetites and desires.

Callicles' *particular* framework of the choice of lives is merely the instantiation of the larger question in a particular context: in Athens here and now, what sort of life should one pursue and why? It is misleading, then, to focus on the choice of lives because while Socrates concludes that

[18] In response, Socrates expresses gratitude for Callicles' strong challenge. He is in luck, he says, for he has found in Callicles an excellent "testing stone" for his soul, an interlocutor with whom he will be able to discover "whether [his] soul has been well cared for" and "whether it lives rightly or not" (486d, 487a). And Callicles is especially suited to assist with such a test: he is clever, he means well for Socrates, and unlike many people he is willing to say what he *really* thinks, even if it seems outrageous.²² Given these qualifications, Socrates hopes that if Callicles can be brought to concur with "what [his] soul believes," then they will have found the real truth of the matter (486e–487a), and he is eager for the opportunity:

Most admirable of all, Callicles, is the examination of those issues about which you took me to task, that of what a man is supposed to be like, and of what he's supposed to devote himself to and how far, both when he's older and when he's young. (487e)

And so in examining his own convictions and "whether [he does] anything incorrectly in [his] own life" (488a), Socrates hopes that they can come to a clearer answer to the question of "how we ought to live" (*πῶς βιωτέον*, 492d).

[19] In considering the question of how we ought to live, Socrates and Callicles lay out sharply contrasting visions of what makes for a

one should avoid political practice in the context of a corrupt democratic Athens, this says nothing about whether one might engage in political activity in a different context (say, in Kallipolis). Ober (1998, pp. 156–247) is helpfully clear on the relation between context and the value of political activity.

22. As Callicles points out (482c–e), both Gorgias and Polus were undone by their deference to conventional notions of what is shameful.

good life. Callicles, for his part, spurns conventional norms of self-control and justice, advocating a life of domination over others in service to the satisfaction of grand and undisciplined appetite. He maintains that what is naturally right and correct is “that the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they” (πλέον ἔχειν, 483d); by the “superior” he means those who are “not only intelligent, but also brave, competent (ἱκανοί) to accomplish whatever they have in mind, without slackening off because of softness of spirit” (491ab). And as Socrates questions him, Callicles rejects any thought of ruling one’s appetites. “How could a man prove happy if he’s enslaved to anyone at all?,” he asks (491de). Rather, he insists that

The man who’ll live correctly ought to allow his own appetites to be as large as possible and not discipline them (μὴ κολλάζειν). And with them as large as possible, he ought to be competent (ἱκανόν) to devote himself to them (ὑπηρετεῖν) by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at any moment. (491e–492a)²³

In short, he tells Socrates, the truth of the matter is that “wantonness, indiscipline, and freedom (ἐλευθερία), if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness (ἀρετή τε καὶ εὐδαιμονία); as for these other things, these fancy phrases, these contracts of men that go against nature, they’re worthless nonsense!” (492c).

[20] Such is Callicles’ praise of injustice and indiscipline, and as Soc-

23. Callicles’ claim that one ought to “serve” (ὑπηρετεῖν) one’s appetites inadvertently betrays his claim that the figure he admires is not “enslaved” to anything at all and unwittingly accepts Socrates’ implicit framework (491d) that the undisciplined person is “ruled” by his appetites rather than “ruling himself.” LSJ, s.v. ὑπηρετέω: “prop. do service on board ship, as a rower.”

rates sees it, the view is a very common one (492d). But Socrates sets himself against this exaltation of *πλεονεξία* and appetite-gratification, challenging Callicles to say whether it is not rather the case that one ought to “be self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself” (492de), and whether it is wrong to say that “those who have no need of anything” are happy (492e). As Socrates sees it, doing wrong is “the ultimate of all bad things” (482b), “a self-controlled soul is a good one” (507a), and the person who rules her appetites will be happy. In contrast, the undisciplined and unjust person whom Callicles praises will put his soul in poor shape and will make his own life miserable.

2.3.2 Evidence of Socrates' View

[21] The main claim that Socrates aims to persuade Callicles to endorse is that “those who are orderly are happier than those who are undisciplined” (493d). To help us understand Socrates' thought that control over appetite is a key characteristic of a healthy soul and of a happy life, we can take as our primary evidence three passages from his dispute with Callicles. In response to Callicles' brusque dismissal of his suggestion that “those who have no need of anything” might be happy—“in that case, stones and corpses would be happiest!”, Callicles exclaims (492e)—, Socrates advances two related myths or images. Later, he draws a helpfully more full analogy between psychological and physical health. Let us go through these passages before moving to comment.²⁴

24. Are these myths acceptable evidence of Socrates' views? Despite the doubts that some have expressed (e.g., Cooper (1999, p. 63)), we can be confident in taking these passages to express Socrates' own views. Recall that Soc-

The Myth of the Water Carriers

[22] First we have the Myth of the Water Carriers (492d–493d), a story that Socrates claims “one of the wise men” once told him. As follows. We are in fact dead and in Hades right now, our bodies our tombs. And “the part of our souls in which our appetites reside” is “the sort of thing to be open to persuasion and to shift back and forth (οἶον ἀναπείθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω)” (493a). This part of the soul can be called a “jar” (πιθανόν) and is “a persuasive and believable thing” (τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν).²⁵ So it is for everyone, but in the case of “fools” (ἀνοήτοι), “the uninitiated” (ἀμύητοι), this appetitive part is undisciplined (τὸ ἀκόλαστον), a *leaking* jar that is impossible to fill (ἀπληστία). Of all the people alive, these are “the most miserable (ἀθλιώτατοι),” because they attempt to

rates has cast his conversation with Callicles as a test of his own life and convictions. He wants to know “whether [his] soul has been well cared for” and “whether it lives rightly or not,” and to see if Callicles can be brought to concur with the convictions that he believes and lives by (486d–488b). And Socrates is quite forthright that he is trying to persuade Callicles to *agree* with him on the question at hand (συγχωρήσαι, 494a). Such an agreement would hardly serve as a test of Socrates’ life and beliefs if it were an agreement to a proposition that Socrates himself did not believe and did not live by. And so, Socrates is consistent in exhorting Callicles, to the end of the dialogue, to take up what is described as Socrates’ *own* way of life. (As Dodds (1959, 492e3) helpfully suggests, we might also consider the evidence of the relative asceticism of Socrates’ own life.) It is fair, then, to take the thoughts that emerge from these passages as Socrates’ own sincere commitments.

25. The sense of the phrase is disputed. I take the active sense, following Dodds’s note (Dodds, 1959, 493a6). Contrast the passive sense in Zeyl’s “a persuadable and suggestible thing” and Fowler’s “as being so impressionable and persuadable.” While the sense Dodds argues for and that I accept seems to be the natural way to take the words (cf. 455a and 458e), the οἶον ἀναπείθεσθαι suggests to some readers a passive sense instead. But it is hardly too strange to put it both ways, that the appetitive part of the soul is both persuadable and persuasive, so I see little reason to be inventive in interpreting the πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν.

“carry water into the leaking jar using another leaky thing, a sieve”—that is, their soul (493b). The soul (or this part of it) is likened to a sieve in view of its “unreliability and forgetfulness” which makes it “unable to retain anything” (493c).

[23] Here Socrates breaks off—this is all a bit odd, he says. But it should serve to make clear “what I want to persuade you to change your mind about if I can: to choose the orderly life, the life that is adequate to and satisfied with its circumstances at any given time (*τοῖς ἀεὶ παροῦσιν ἱκανῶς καὶ ἐξαρκούντως ἔχοντα*) instead of the insatiable, undisciplined life” (493cd).

The Image of the Leaky Jars

[24] Callicles is not persuaded by the Myth of the Water Carriers, and so Socrates offers “another image, one from the same school”: the Image of the Leaky Jars (493d–494b). This is supposed to clarify what Callicles is committing himself to with regard to the life of the self-controlled person as opposed to the undisciplined person (*ὁ σώφρωνος, ὁ ἀκολάστος*, 493d). As follows. Imagine two men, each with many jars. The goods that are to fill these jars are “scarce and difficult to come by, procurable only with much toil and trouble” (*μετὰ πολλῶν πόνων καὶ χαλεπῶν*, 493e). As for the first man, the self-controlled one, his jars are “sound and full” (*ὑγιεῖς καὶ πλήρεις*)²⁶ and, having filled them, he gives them no further thought and can relax with regard to them (493e). But as for the second man, the undisciplined one, his jars are “leaky and unsound” (*τετρημένα*

26. Readers without Greek should note that *ὑγιής* in another context would be rendered “healthy.” Used of vessels the word means “sound” as opposed to *σαθρός*, “cracked” or “unsound.” LSJ, s.v. *σαθρός, ὑγιής*.

καὶ σαθρά) and “he’s forced ever to be filling them, day and night, or else he suffers extreme pain” (494a). With this image in mind, Socrates asks, is Callicles ready to concede that the orderly life is better than the undisciplined life (κόσμος, ἀκολάστος)? — But Callicles continues to resist, saying that the man who has filled himself up no longer has any pleasure or pain, and that “that’s living like a stone, as I was saying just now. Rather, living pleasantly consists in this: having as much as possible flow in” (494ab).

Appetite and Medicine

[25] We can add in one final passage as evidence to work with. After a stretch of argument, Socrates has brought Callicles to admit a distinction between “good” and “bad” pleasures. Some pleasures and pains are good and beneficial (αἱ ἀγαθαί, αἱ ὠφέλιμοι), others are bad and harmful (αἱ κακαί, αἱ βλαβεραί); in the case of the body, for example, good pleasures and pains are those that produce bodily health and excellence while bad ones produce the opposite (499de). What Socrates wants to argue is that the same holds true for the soul (501bc). After some back and forth, Socrates draws the analogy more fully between physical and psychological health, making some important claims about the connection between the state of one’s soul and the appetites that one experiences. Consider the following (Callicles omitted):

Yes, for what benefit is there, Callicles, in giving a body that’s sick and in wretched shape (κάμνοντι καὶ μοχθηρῶς διακεμένῳ) plenty of even the most pleasant food or drink or anything else whatever, when it won’t do the man a bit more good, or, quite the contrary, when by a fair reckoning it’ll do him even less good?

For I don’t suppose that it profits a man (λυσitteλεῖ) to live

with his body in wretched condition (μετὰ μοχθηρίας σώματος ζῆν), since in this case he necessarily *lives* wretchedly, too (οὕτω καὶ ζῆν μοχθηρῶς)

Now, isn't it also true that while doctors generally allow a healthy person to fill up his appetites (οὐκοῦν καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἀποπιμπλάναι)—for example, eating when hungry or drinking when thirsty, as much as he likes—, they practically never allow a sick person to fill himself up with what he has an appetite for?

And isn't it just the same way with the soul, my excellent friend (περὶ δὲ ψυχὴν ... οὐχ ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος)? As long as it's corrupt—in that it's foolish, undisciplined (ἀκόλαστος), unjust, and impious—, it should be kept away from its appetites and not be permitted to do anything other than what will make it better.

For this is no doubt better for the soul itself?

Now isn't keeping it away from what it has an appetite for, disciplining it (κολάζειν)?

So to be disciplined is better for the soul than indiscipline (τὸ κολάζεσθαι ἄρα τῇ ψυχῇ ἄμεινόν ἐστιν ἢ ἡ ἀκολασία), which is what you were thinking just now. (504e–505b, Callicles omitted)

2.3.3 Appetite and the Soul

[26] Throughout his conversation with Callicles, Socrates is aiming to persuade the young politician that “those who are orderly are happier than those who are undisciplined” (493d). And his case rests, fundamentally, on a claim about how appetite functions in the soul. In the conversation with Polus, Socrates had claimed that thoughtlessly pursuing pleasure to the point of acting wrongly somehow harms the soul by making it “unhealthy” and makes the wrongdoer miserable; we are now in a position to see just what Socrates thinks this poor health consists in, and in the following sections, to see how this is supposed to support his claim that it would be *miserable* to live with a soul that is undisciplined and unjust.

Two Basic Features of Socrates' Psychological Theory

[27] To begin, let us note two basic features of the psychological picture that emerges from these passages. First (1), in the Myth of the Water Carriers we find Socrates describing the soul as divided into distinct parts. The details of the myth and the psychological division are rather muddled—as Socrates comments when he breaks off, “this is all a bit odd”—but the division is there. And while the *Gorgias* does not approach the sharpness of the body/soul division of the *Phaedo* or the tripartite model of the *Republic*,²⁷ the division that it features will nevertheless prove significant. In the picture Socrates offers, one part of the soul is the site of appetite and is described as fickle, open to persuasion, and itself “persuasive.” The other part of the soul appears to do the work to fill the appetites; presumably this is the site of reason and calculation.²⁸ Without preempting later argument, we can say for now that the similarity to Plato's later psychological models in this one respect is at least significant insofar as this one similarity should encourage us to consider whether the psychological theory evident in the *Gorgias* may be similar to those later models in other respects as well.

[28] The second basic feature of the psychological picture that we

27. Though the division does anticipate features that will be developed in those later models. E.g., Socrates suggests the direction of the *Phaedo* in the claim that the body is the site of its own appetites (517d, cf. his comment to Polus at 465cd imagining what would be the case “if the soul didn't rule the body”).

28. Dodds (1959, *ad loc.*) comments that the division captures “the popular distinction between reason and impulse which is already present, e.g., at Theognis 631 or Aesch. *Pers.* 767, and is referred to by Aristotle, *E.N.* 1102a26, *de an.* 432a26.”

should note is (2) the model of appetite and desire as a kind of “filling-up” (*πλήρωσις*). This description of appetite, evident in all three of the above passages, becomes especially clear in the argument that follows the myths (495e–497d). In this argument, Socrates uses hunger and thirst as the paradigmatic examples of desire. As he describes it (and Callicles accepts the description without hesitation), an appetite is something that is experienced as a kind of *lack* or *deficiency* accompanied by pain while filling the lack brings pleasure and assuages the pain, such that the pleasure and pain of appetite are twinned.²⁹ Along with this idea of appetite as filling-up is the suggestion, prominent in the Image of the Leaky Jars, that the objects of desire that will satisfy the want are scarce and take painful toil to acquire. This description of appetite as a painful lack that is difficult to fill will form a basic part of Socrates’ case that the wrongdoer will be miserable.

Describing the Unhealthy Soul

[29] With these psychological claims in place, we can now more helpfully describe how Socrates conceives of the unhealthy soul. The first characteristic of the unhealthy soul is (A) that its appetitive part is undisciplined, such that it experiences strong appetites as great needs. This emerges from the basic contrast between the figures that Callicles and Socrates respectively praise. Callicles believes that the best man “ought to allow his own appetites to be as large as possible and not discipline them (*μὴ κολλάζειν*), and with them as large as possible, he ought ...

29. As with the divided soul, the model of appetite as *πλήρωσις* is not unique to the *Gorgias*.

to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time” (491e–492a); in contrast, Socrates praises the self-controlled who “have no need of anything” (492e). The relevant difference here is that the undisciplined person experiences strong appetites as demanding needs that threaten great pain if not satisfied while the self-controlled person, with disciplined appetite, does not experience such “need.”

[30] The second characteristic of the unhealthy soul is (B) that its appetites are *insatiable* in some important sense (*ἀπληστία*, literally “un-fillable”). This is the clear implication of the Myth of the Water Carriers and the Image of the Leaky Jars. The appetitive part of the undisciplined soul is “leaky and unsound” (*τετρημένα καὶ σαθρά*, 494a), afflicted with “unreliability and forgetfulness” that denies it any lasting satisfaction from the attainment of whatever it desires (493c).

[31] These characteristics of the unhealthy soul can be described in another way: (C) that the unhealthy soul is *disordered*, in the sense that its reasoning capacity does not successfully lead in its deliberations but rather is habitually devoted to the service of appetite. In talking about health of the soul, Socrates argues that the soul is in good condition and is “useful” when it has a certain “organization and order” (504b), and he specifies the order he has in mind: “an orderly soul is a self-controlled one” and “a self-controlled soul is a good one” (506e–507a). As for what he has in mind when he speaks of “self-control,” the quality that makes for a good soul, Socrates is clear that he means “nothing fancy—just what the Many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself” (491de). The order that makes for a good soul, then, is an order in which the reasoning capacity “rules” the appetites. This stands in contrast to the soul of the undisciplined and

disordered person whom Callicles praises, who is bound in service to his appetite and directs all of his efforts toward acquiring “whatever he may have an appetite for at any moment” (492a).

[32] In contrasting the disorder of the unhealthy soul with the order and self-control of the healthy soul, Socrates’ idea seems to be that in an unhealthy soul decision-making comes to be dominated by the pull of strong and immediate appetite, which interferes with the agent’s ability to think clearly and well about what is really in her overall best interest. This, then, would explain his description of those with unhealthy souls as “fools” in whom the rational capacity of the soul is like “a leaky thing, a sieve” (493b).³⁰

[33] Taking these three related characteristics of the unhealthy soul

30. It is important to note here that nothing in this suggestion that the reasoning capacity in an unhealthy soul is weak and in some sense subordinate requires Socrates to give up his usual commitment to motivational intellectualism. He never seems to think that the agent with the unhealthy soul acts against her in-the-moment judgment of what is in her best interest—he nowhere allows for the phenomenon of synchronic akrasia. Rather, he only suggests that the agent’s reasoning about what is in his best interest is distorted by his strong appetites and that he judges poorly.

This serves to answer concerns like those of Cooper (1999), who seems to believe that we cannot count Socrates’ psychological arguments as his own views because (Cooper thinks) they would be in tension with a commitment to motivational intellectualism. But there need be no such tension: all Socrates needs for his psychological argument is the idea that an appetite that is not satisfied is painful and that undisciplined appetite can distort the calculus that goes into making a judgment. Nothing in this needs to suggest that the agent might act against judgment once formed, only that appetite might cause the agent to misjudge.

Brickhouse and Smith (2010, e.g., pp. 105–108) are good on how the “harm to the soul” that can be expected from acting wrongly should be understood as a growing of appetite that tends to impair one’s capacity for good judgment. While I agree with their account in a certain sense, I will have more to say below both on the impaired rational capacity of the disordered soul and on the question of how this makes the person with the unhealthy soul *miserable*, a question with regard to which their analysis falls somewhat short.

together, Socrates will suggest that the large and insatiable appetite experienced by the unhealthy and disordered soul lead it to injustice and other vice. Callicles praises the man with large appetites who is “competent (*ἱκανόν*) to devote himself to them (*ὑπηρετεῖν*) by virtue of his bravery and intelligence, and to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time” (492a). As Socrates puts it, this is the person who seeks to fill them “from some source or other”—that is, by any means possible (492d). This will explain Socrates’ contention that the healthy soul is characterized by “justice and self-control” (504d) while the unhealthy soul is “foolish, undisciplined (*ἀκόλαστος*), unjust, and impious.” It is the orientation of such a soul toward serving its appetites, just like that, that leads it to unjust action.

Growing and Shrinking Appetite

[34] Now that we have given a bit more specificity to Socrates’ notion of an unhealthy soul, we can round out this section with a final psychological claim: the claim that appetites grow and shrink as they are indulged or resisted. This thought emerges from Socrates’ insistence that, just as in the case of the body, the pursuit of some pleasures will put the soul in a good state while the pursuit of others will put it in a bad state (499d, 501bc, 503cd, and especially 518c–519b). So if what it is to have an unhealthy soul is to have a soul that is undisciplined and afflicted by strong appetite, then what Socrates is suggesting is that unjust action, giving priority to appetite and working to satisfy it by whatever means, will cause the appetites in one’s soul to grow stronger. Hence the claim that it would be harmful for the person whose soul is already unhealthy to indulge her appetites further, as this would only make her soul worse

off (504e–505b, quoted above).

[35] And just as indulging appetite causes it to grow stronger and more unruly so too restraint and restriction of appetite causes it to shrink and become more manageable. Hence Socrates' suggestion that it is better for the unhealthy soul to be "disciplined" (*κολάζειν*) by being kept away from its appetites, and that this will cause it to become better (505b).

[36] This idea of reinforcement, that one's actions shape one's appetites, is evident throughout the dialogue. Consider, for example, Socrates' suggestion to Callicles about political ambition. When an ambitious young man considers that only "a man of like character (*ὁμοήθης*)" to whomever has power in the city, "one who approves and disapproves of the same things" (510c), will be well-liked by the powerful, he may draw the lesson that he ought "to get himself accustomed right from childhood onward to like and dislike (*χαίρειν, ἄχεσθαι*) the same things as the master, and to make sure that he'll be as like him as possible" (510d). But the consequence of acting in imitation of the tyrant will be a soul that is "corrupt and mutilated" (511a),³¹ afflicted by strong appetite, unlike the soul of the disciplined person who has no need of anything.

[37] This claim of reinforcement lies at the heart of Socrates' idea of "health of the soul." Not only does it form a major part of his case that even the successful wrongdoer is miserable, but it also explains other puzzling ideas that we find in the dialogue. For example, it gives us a way to understand his earlier insistence to Polus, then obscure, that punish-

31. Cf. Callicles' stated worry that the Many "shape" or "mold" the youth through "charms and incantations" (483e–484a), a suggestive line that, I suppose, Socrates and Plato are quite interested in.

ment has a rehabilitative effect on the wrongdoer by putting her soul in a better state (477e–481b). It is reasonable for the reader to wonder, at that point in the dialogue, how punishment is supposed to rehabilitate the criminal; now, we have the tools to explain Socrates' claim. Punishment is rehabilitative in that it frustrates the wrongdoer's appetite for wrongdoing and so weakens it, and perhaps also in giving the wrongdoer a memorable reason against wrongdoing to include in her future deliberations. In this way, then, properly administered punishment can work both directly and indirectly to put the soul of the wrongdoer in better shape by diminishing her allegiance to the appetites that led him to do wrong in the first place.³²

[38] In short, we can say that when Socrates speaks of "health of the soul," he is working with the idea of a self-reinforcing vicious circle through the strengthening and weakening of appetite.³³ Acting badly now will make one want to act badly in the future and will increase the difficulty and pain of reform. But keeping the person with unhealthy character away from what she wants will help improve the soul by "disciplining" appetite and rendering her soul more just and self-controlled,³⁴ closer to the ideal of the self-controlled person who needs little.³⁵

32. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith (2010, pp. 118–124). As noted by Moss (2007, p. 239) and Sedley (2009, p. 64), this thought of restricting appetite as "disciplining" the soul is what explains Socrates' suggestion that reform of the soul can only come through *pain* (525b). Even in the case of gentler corrections or punishments, the vicious person restrained from the object of her desire will feel the pain of unsatisfied appetite.

33. Cf. *Crito* 47e–48a, quoted above.

34. Cf. to Polus at 478d.

35. Officially, Socrates has claimed that *committing injustice* harms the soul of

2.4 The Misery of Vice

[39] Now that we have a clearer picture of the psychological theory that Socrates is working with, we can finally start to say why, specifically, he thinks that it would be so miserable to live with a soul made unhealthy through wrongdoing.

2.4.1 The Misery of the Ordinary Wrongdoer

[40] To begin, consider the idea that the appetites of the unjust person are undisciplined and grow large and strong. This has several unpleasant implications for the life of wrongdoing. First of all (1), this suggests that the pain experienced when the wrongdoer's strong and demanding appetites go unfilled will be correspondingly greater than the pain of the self-controlled person who faces disappointment. Second (2), on a similar note, Socrates must think that the painful toil required to satisfy such appetites is greater as well. And, of course, both of these sources of discontent will only increase as her appetites grow through being indulged.³⁶

the wrongdoer and leads to misery. But throughout the conversation with Callicles, the arguments are put in terms of *indiscipline* rather than *injustice*. The thought seems to be that, when we try to explain *why* someone ventures into injustice, we must refer to some desire or appetite as motivation for the action. So it is that the descriptions of injustice in Plato's work—as in Greek thought generally—focus on the sort of pleonexastic desire praised by Polus and Callicles. The root motivation of injustice, on this picture, is the desire to have more than one's share. See, e.g., Cooper (2004) for some relevant discussion.

36. This also raises the possibility that one difficulty of living with an unhealthy soul, afflicted by strong appetite, might be the danger of *distraction*. If it is difficult to satisfy any one appetite, then the person afflicted with strong appetites may simply find it difficult to harmonize her vari-

[41] Third (3), we can say that the person with strong appetites and great needs is generally less self-sufficient, in something like the sense taken up by later Greek philosophers. Her peace of mind is more dependent on—and so, vulnerable to—facts about the world over which she has no control than is the contentment of the self-controlled person. For example, she will require great resources, which may or may not be available, to satisfy her appetites, and the actions of others or other external events will pose a more significant danger to her contentment in view of her great needs. Generally speaking, then, her satisfaction is less in her control—that is, is less something that she can achieve through her own action—and more dependent on luck or other such factors.

[42] And in fact we do see Socrates allude to such a thought of dependence and vulnerability in throwing Callicles' language of praise back at him: Callicles admires the “superior” men who are “competent” or “adequate” (*ἱκανός*) to the task of satisfying whatever grand appetite they may have “at any moment” (*ἀεί*, 492a); Socrates, in contrast, praises the life that is “adequate to and satisfied with its circumstances at any time” (*τοῖς ἀεὶ παροῦσιν ἱκανῶς καὶ ἐξαρκούντως*, 493c). In reversing Callicles' talk of being “adequate” (*ἱκανός*) to the circumstances of “any moment” (*ἀεί*), Socrates is suggesting, with some subtlety, that the undisciplined person is in some danger on precisely this count—that she has made it unnecessarily difficult for herself to achieve any satisfaction by making

ous projects or to form a coherent plan of life. Each appetite pulling away from the other, she may find it difficult to satisfy any one want, much less a significant set of them. I leave the suggestion to a footnote because despite the plausibility of the thought under Socrates' psychological model, I do not see much evidence in the *Gorgias* for such a picture of conflicting desires—it just does not seem to come up.

her peace of mind dependent upon the contingencies of circumstance and so vulnerable to disruption by events outside of her control, no matter how intelligent or brave she is. This amounts to a significant risk of misery that the self-controlled person does not face.

[43] On top of all of this, compounding the troubles of the unhealthy soul is the particular characteristic of undisciplined appetite expressed in the Myth of the Water Carriers and the Image of the Leaky Jars, (4) that it is *insatiable*. The thought seems to be that any satisfaction that the unjust person *does* acquire will only be short-lived—her undisciplined soul is “unreliable and forgetful” and “unable to retain anything,” and so any contentment she may achieve will be fleeting.

[44] Assembling this set of claims about undisciplined appetite, we find that Socrates has painted a pretty grim picture of the life of the person whose soul is unhealthy. For fear of “extreme pain” if her grand appetites are not satisfied, such a person must set herself to toilsome work, much pain and trouble, while the goal toward which she works is one that is more distant and difficult when compared to what others need in order to avoid the pain of want. And on top of that, even if the undisciplined person *does* manage to attain some object of her desire, her satisfaction will be short-lived and she must soon start scrambling after the next appetite—she never gets any rest. And the worst part of all of this is that these patterns are self-reinforcing, with her desires growing stronger and more difficult to deny and her character growing more difficult to reform as she chases what she thinks she “needs” to be happy. Such a person is in pain if she does not fill her appetites, the struggle she is subjected to is especially painful and toilsome, and once any particular goal is accomplished she cannot relax but must look for

her next satisfaction, again for fear of suffering great pain. She lives a life *dominated* by or even *enslaved* to appetite.³⁷ Any way about it, then, such a person as Socrates describes seems unlikely to avoid regular pain and perpetual trouble. And so it is no surprise that Socrates, working with this particular psychological theory, believes that the wrongdoer will be made *miserable* (*ἄθλιος*) by her wrongdoing.

[45] But what of the apparently successful wrongdoer, the one who is relatively successful in serving his appetites? Even here, Socrates can make his case. For considering the undisciplined person's dependence upon facts about the world outside of her control and the insatiability of her appetites, it is clear that she will have a lot to worry about. Even if she experiences success now, she cannot be sure that her success will continue into the future—and the prospect of future success is further jeopardized by the antagonism or ill-will that she has likely engendered in her wrongdoing.³⁸ The undisciplined person, then, has reason for con-

37. Recall Callicles' *ὑπηρετεῖν*, discussed above.

On the image of the undisciplined person as pressed into service to her appetite, we might think of Kant's worry that the irrational actor is unfree, a slave to inclination. While that is certainly an idea here, Plato does not ever seem to worry much about unfreedom as a problem *just as such*—while it provides him a rhetorically effective reversal of Callicles' admiration of "freedom" and scorn of "slavery" (and so, may serve to counter Callicles' own ideals), for Plato the problem does not seem to be just the fact of unfreedom but rather, that it is unfreedom in the service of a bad master that will lead the actor wrong and cause her harm. Plato is never all that worried about autonomy as a value just in itself, but only about the outcomes that the actor might expect from self-rule or rule by others (or by "other" psychological drives, not identified with the agent's "true" self). Cf. the end of *Republic* IX on making oneself a slave to the wise man, the *Laws* on the idea that citizens ought to be "slaves to the laws," and so on.

38. If we are considering the tyrant as the paradigmatic example, then it would not be wrong to think of the usual tyrannical tropes. Threats to power, unreliable courtiers, rebellious subjects, and so on. Consider the children

siderable anxiety about the future. But insofar as it is plausible to think that peace of mind—and so, happiness—require some fairly robust assurance that one’s situation is secure over a number of reasonably likely possible futures, then it seems that even the successful wrongdoer will have to worry over a constant risk of misery. Wrongdoing, then, even if relatively successful, does not seem like a very good strategy for building a happy life.

2.4.2 The Superhumanly Successful Tyrant

[46] But of course, the challenge that Socrates has taken on is far stronger than that of the everyday wrongdoer who experiences some moderate success in her wickedness. For Socrates has committed himself to a claim about the figure that we have called the Successful Tyrant, the wrongdoer who is *universally successful* in her endeavors. If the argument above makes use of the idea that pursuing grand appetites will be difficult and troublesome and will carry a risk of failure, and of the idea that the undisciplined person has reason to be anxious about the future, then will these reasons speak to the case of the person to whom Socrates has granted universal success? Such a figure is both always successful and, we might think, does not have too much cause for anxiety: her skill in wrongdoing and her continued success in injustice give her good warrant to be confident that she will prove capable of whatever challenges arise, just as any expert has reason to be confident. (Socrates, of course,

of Peisistratus as depicted in the *Constitution of Athens* 17–19; the example is especially apt for the role that Harmodius and Aristogeiton have as part of the official mythology of democratic Athens (COA 58). Such a figure, it seems, has much to be anxious over.

is always ready to argue for the benefits of expertise!)³⁹

[47] Now, it is true that even the complete expert might be overwhelmed by events that she could not have predicted and that she cannot adequately respond to. But we can heighten the abilities of our imagined wrongdoer even further. For in other dialogues Socrates goes so far as to grant *omniscience*, including *complete knowledge of the future*, to the figure who provides the challenge—and *still* he maintains that such a person, acting wrongly, will miss out on happiness.⁴⁰ And while we might

39. To the point about confidence and expertise, cf. Glaukon's challenge in *Republic* II, imagining an unjust person who is "complete in his own way of life": "First, therefore, we must suppose that an unjust person will act as clever craftsmen do: A first-rate captain or doctor, for example, knows the difference between what his craft can and can't do. He attempts the first but lets the second go by, and if he happens to slip, he can put things right ... If any of [the unjust person's] activities should be discovered, he must be able to speak persuasively or to use force. And if force is needed, he must have the help of courage and strength and of substantial wealth and friends with which he has provided himself" (*Republic* II.360e–361b). Cf. Socrates' description, to Polus, of those who would go to any lengths to avoid being punished for their crimes at 479bc, including the parallel "funds and friends." The whole point of the Challenge of the Successful Tyrant is to remove from Socrates' arsenal the argument that the wrongdoer might fail. As noted, the Challenge serves in the *Gorgias* as a first draft of the *Republic's* Ring of Gyges: to test the case of complete success in wickedness enjoyed with impunity.

40. For what it is worth, it is not clear to me exactly how Plato understands the foreknowledge that Socrates grants the figure under consideration in these places. It might be limited to knowledge in a passive sense of events that will occur or challenges that will arise, rather than a knowledge thought of as some science-fiction vision of every possible branching future that might be birthed by an action (as depicted, e.g., in the Philip K. Dick story "The Golden Man").

Since the model Plato uses is that of the seer, we would need to look into Greek conceptions of the seer's foresight to understand what exactly might be in play here. But for the sake of the argument I want to accept the absolutely strongest possible version of the challenge, the knowledge and fortune that will guarantee universal success along with complete assurance that such success will continue.

(In other words, while it is possible that I am extending the challenge

imagine that even in this case there might arise some overwhelming disaster that even the omniscient Tyrant could not escape or overcome, let us grant our Tyrant *every* possible concession, no matter how hyperbolic or superhuman: complete omniscience, including full knowledge of the future, all the goods of fortune granted (no shortage of resources, no catastrophic external event, and so on)—in short, every ingredient to guarantee universal success and the secure knowledge that such success will continue into the future—and then, let us grant this Tyrant immortality besides all of that. All of these concessions serve to isolate Socrates' argument to its purest form, and are in keeping with the general way that he talks about the power of knowledge.⁴¹

[48] So, considering the Successful Tyrant as an omniscient and supremely fortunate figure, what does Socrates have left to support his claim that even *this* wrongdoer will be miserable? Let us consider two thoughts that likely form part of Socrates' case against this superhumanly successful wrongdoer. In the first place (1), Socrates can claim that even such a superhuman wrongdoer will face a constant and perpetual struggle to satisfy her appetites, even if that struggle results in universal success. The wrongdoer, thoroughly in thrall to appetite, will never be at leisure with regard to her needs, never at a place where she can “give them no further thought.” Instead, she must always worry over them, tending to them “day and night,” without rest, for fear of “extreme

further than it is taken at any one point in the texts, we are nevertheless proceeding in the same spirit, conceding everything we can that resembles a worry about practicability or success to see what the argument has left.)

41. See especially the use of *ἐντυχία* in the First Protreptic of the *Euthydemus*, with comment from Jones (2013).

pain.” To return to the theme of the wrongdoer’s worry, we might say that there is more to stress than just anxiety over possible failure—there is also just the stress of unrelenting toil. And for the undisciplined person, whose appetites are “unfillable,” the effort to satisfy her desires, even if successful now and guaranteed of success in the future, will be a constant and wearing struggle. It certainly seems plausible, then, to suggest that such a life will be a miserable one, or at least one that is more miserable than the life of the self-controlled person who can rest at leisure with regard to her desires.

[49] Another Socratic claim that is in play when considering the superhumanly successful wrongdoer is (2) that such a life is rife with pain of its own. This thought comes from the model of appetite as “filling up” that Socrates and Callicles are working with. On this model, a life devoted to filling up appetite is hardly a life of pleasure without pain—quite the contrary, insofar as the pleasures of appetite are always accompanied by an inverse pain. This suggestion is, in effect, the strategy that Socrates pursues against Callicles at 495e–497a. While Callicles has committed himself to the idea that the life in service to appetite is the good and pleasant life (494c–495a), Socrates argues that since “every deficiency and appetite is painful” (496d) and since the pleasure lies only in filling up the lack, then on this model, the person experiencing pleasure from satisfying appetite is at the very same time experiencing the pain of the appetite itself that needs filling. And these pains only grow stronger along with the appetites as the wrongdoer’s soul is further corrupted.

[50] The implication is plain enough. It would seem odd to suggest that the person who experiences the most acute and frequent pangs of

hunger is the one who lives the best life, but on the model of appetite that both Socrates and Callicles espouse, this is what Callicles' claim amounts to. On this picture, the person with strong appetites and the ability to satisfy them whom Callicles admires turns out to be an example not only of great pleasure but also of great pain. But if we suppose pleasure is the only good by which to judge the success of a life, as Callicles suggests at times (e.g., 494e–495a), then it seems that, on balance, the life of successful appetite gratification is at the very least something of a wash, in terms of pleasure and pain—and that other considerations (such as the unrelenting toil required) may lead us to judge such a life a failure. The hedonistic ideal that Callicles expresses, then, is futile and self-undermining.

[51] While more will be said in the following section on Socrates' assessment of the supremely Successful Tyrant, we have at this point been through the bulk of the argument that even the superhumanly successful wrongdoer will be made miserable by vice. Now of course, this argument does rest on a particular theory of human psychology, one that Plato's readers—unlike Socrates' interlocutors—might reject. But whether or not Socrates' psychological theory seems plausible is beside the point for my purposes: any way about it, I have described the argument as Socrates makes it. And since there is no real reason to doubt that Socrates—or Plato—is committed to the empirical premises that underpin the argument, then we have what we need in order to construct an account of Socratic ethics and politics.

[52] And if Socrates is so committed even in the case of such a hyperbolic challenge as the Successful Tyrant, then how much more will he stick to his conviction once we return to cases closer to the world as we

know it? After all, when we take stock of everything that has been conceded to the wrongdoer set as a challenge to Socrates, the list is quite remarkable. We have granted this character sufficient external resources and the cooperation of others for any imaginable endeavor, expert skill to the point of omniscience, perfect knowledge of the future and how her own actions might affect it, freedom from overwhelming or unavoidable catastrophe from external events, and immortality on top of all of that. And even in *this* case, it looks like Socrates has something that he can say for his position, in arguing that such a life will be one of constant toil, perpetual dissatisfaction, and ongoing severe pains to match the heights of pleasure to which our wrongdoer aspires.

2.5 Vice and Poor Judgment

[53] So goes Socrates' account of the wrongdoer's misery. But our discussion of the unhealthy soul is not yet complete. So far, we have focused on the effect of vice on the appetitive part of the soul and, thereby, on the wrongdoer's contentment. But what of the rational part of the soul? Is its functioning also adversely affected by vice? In this section, I consider and reject an interpretation of the consequences of vice that explains the misery of the wrongdoer in terms of impaired capacity for instrumental reasoning. Then, in considering the puzzle of the wrongdoer who resists persuasion or who does not take herself to be miserable, I comment on the specific mistake in judgment that the wrongdoer makes in assessing her own life and in deliberating about how to attain happiness.

2.5.1 A Weakness of Instrumental Reasoning?

[54] Our initial question follows on the spirit of the previous, of allowing back in more “practical” concerns about success and failure and the operations of the world as we know it. Is Socrates’ craft analogy meant to suggest that the undisciplined appetites of an unhealthy soul will significantly interfere with the actor’s ability to reason clearly about how best to pursue her goals in any given situation?

[55] To help frame the point, recall the discussion of pandering and beneficent practices to which Socrates devotes so much effort in the *Gorgias*. A pandering practice, as he tells it, is one that “doesn’t think about what’s best” but rather, refusing to stop and interrogate whatever seems good at any given moment, it goes after what seems immediately pleasant. This way of relating to one’s desires is what is enshrined in Callicles’ thought that the person who would live well must use any means necessary to go after “whatever he may have an appetite for at any moment” (492a).

[56] And once we are in a position to consider such a pandering ideal from the perspective of Socrates’ psychological theory, we may think to ascribe to Socrates another reason to believe that the wrongdoer’s lack of discipline will end up making her miserable. For as the wrongdoer’s appetites grow stronger, her habitual orientation toward serving just any appetite that she has, combined with the ever-stronger and more-insistent experience of the objects of appetite as needs that would be good for her to fulfill, might make it more and more difficult for her to reason clearly and correctly about how best to pursue her goals or to stick with any one plan long enough to see it through: she may find herself, at

any moment, beset by the distraction of extreme appetite that distorts her assessment of her situation and her judgment about what she ought to do.⁴²

[57] And it appears to be something like this thought that Brickhouse and Smith make the core of their description of the Socratic argument: Wrongdoing will make the wrongdoer miserable because it harms the soul and makes the wrongdoer worse at deliberating about how best to achieve her ends. To attribute this thought to Socrates, they bring in a line from *Republic* I.⁴³ There, in his discussion with Thrasymachus, Socrates argues that the function of the soul lies in “taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and the like,” such that the good and virtuous soul does these things well while a bad and vicious soul does them badly (*Rep.* I.353de).

[58] Of course, missing from the argument as it is put to Thrasymachus is some notion of *why* the unjust soul should be bad at managing and deliberating about what is good for the wrongdoer. This is filled in later in the *Republic* with the picture of the tripartite soul and the idea that in doing wrong the wrongdoer subordinates the rational part of her soul to the appetitive part, restricting it to reasoning about how to acquire the objects of appetite and perhaps also weakening its ability to

42. Again, the suggestion is not that undisciplined appetite might *override* a judgment that the agent has formed and cause her to act against her own belief about what she ought to do—nothing here need allow for synchronic akrasia. The suggestion is only that undisciplined appetite and the vicious person’s habits of deliberation will interfere with the calculus that goes into forming the judgment, tending to produce poor ideas of what the agent ought to do.

43. Brickhouse and Smith (2010, pp. 119–120, 127–128).

reason in some general sense (e.g., *Rep.* IX.588b–592b). Or to put the idea in the language of the *Gorgias*, we might think that once consequence of indiscipline will be that the wrongdoer, afflicted by ever-stronger appetites, will be less able to reason clearly about how to achieve her goals. For such a servile way of relating to whatever seems immediately appealing as the unreflective approach to life and decision-making that Callicles' ideal honors is hardly likely to lead to any sort of longterm success in one's projects.

[59] On Brickhouse and Smith's telling, then, the Socratic argument can be expressed plainly enough: by growing her appetites, the wrongdoer makes herself worse and worse at deliberating about how to achieve her goals, and so she becomes more and more likely to fail in her efforts and catch all the pain that comes with failure. The more vicious the person, the more ineffective she will be in her vice.

[60] But the thought that vice makes the vicious person *ineffective* is one that, on balance, we cannot reasonably attribute to Socrates. For there simply is not much evidence of such a claim in either *Gorgias* or the *Republic*, and Socrates is quite happy to entertain thoughts about the contrary, about wrongdoers who are all too effective in their wrongdoing. Later in the *Republic*, we find Socrates worrying that the most effective wrongdoers are those with promising natures who become corrupted by bad education, and that these are "the ones who do the greatest evils to cities and individuals" (*Rep.* VI.495ab, cf. VI.591de), and commenting to his interlocutors:

Have you never noticed this about people who are said to be vicious but clever, how keen the vision of their little souls is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight isn't inferior but rather is

forced to serve evil ends, so that the sharper it sees, the more evil it accomplishes. (*Rep.* VII.519a)

And when the “consequences” of wrongdoing are allowed back into the argument in *Republic* X, the thought is first that even the clever wrongdoer is likely to be caught and punished and second that she will fare poorly in the afterlife—not that she will be ineffective in her wickedness (*Rep.* X.612a ff.).

[61] And we see the same in the *Gorgias*. Socrates never suggests that Archelaus is bumbling in his tyranny, he never contests Callicles’ supposition that there are wrongdoers who are intelligent and brave and capable of managing the affairs of the city and their own lives to achieve their ends (491ab), he never suggests that Pericles was *ineffective* in satisfying the city’s appetites—quite the contrary! Socrates is happy to allow that the (wrongly) revered politicians of old were “better servants than the men of today” in the sense that they were “more capable than [today’s politicians] of satisfying the city’s appetites” (517b).

[62] Considering this evidence, then, we cannot reasonably attribute to Socrates the thought that the problem with vice is that it makes the vicious person *ineffective* in pursuing her goals. Brickhouse and Smith are wrong to place such a thought at the heart of the Socratic argument that wrongdoing makes the wrongdoer miserable. Not only do we have better evidence of Socrates allowing the opposite view—that certain wrongdoers are quite effective in their wrongdoing—but also, to make such a claim is simply to repeat the mistake of reducing Socrates’ argument to a worry about *success*; and so, such a claim is unable to account for (other than by an attempt to explain away) the case of the Successful Tyrant.

[63] Now, as it turns out, Socrates certainly *would* say that the un-

healthy soul is bad at deliberating. But what the vicious person is bad at deliberating about is *not* the instrumental question of how best to achieve her (immediate or acknowledged) ends, but rather—as will be shown in what follows—the specific question of the quality of her life, the state of his psychological health, and the relation between the two.

2.5.2 Resistance to Persuasion

[64] The argument begins from the characterization of Socrates' interlocutors, from their initial disbelief of his claims to their continued resistance to persuasion in argument. So we find Polus suggesting that Socrates' claim is simply absurd—the tyrant Archelaus, successful in wickedness, “remains unaware of how ‘miserable’ he’s become, and feels no remorse either!” (471b). If Archelaus were miserable, Polus thinks, then surely he would know it! And later, in response to Socrates' description of the painful struggle of the undisciplined person, Callicles proves thoroughly resistant to persuasion: “that’s living like a stone!”, he says (494ab). Both of Socrates' interlocutors have serious trouble imagining that the wrongdoer is miserable; Polus' response, in particular, poses a challenge for Socrates: how could Archelaus be miserable and yet not realize it?

[65] This is a genuine puzzle. And Socrates' response to this sort of resistance from his interlocutors is interesting. In part, he turns to connotations of *ἄθλιος* that this chapter has largely set aside, those that have less to do with misery. For example, Callicles charges that the life of the self-controlled person is the life of a stone or a corpse; Socrates replies that “the life of those people you call happiest is a bizarre one (*δευός*) too” (492e), and likens such a life to that of a disgustingly messy bird

(494b).⁴⁴ He follows with the example of the man with the itch, a series that culminates in the life of the *κίναιδος*, one that Socrates judges to be “frightfully shameful and *ἄθλιος*,” regardless of its pleasures. We might say that, in Socrates’ view, the choice of such a life of slavish service to appetite is one that nobody in their right mind would make.

[66] But be that as it may, it suggests a second and much more interesting aspect of Socrates’ response to his interlocutors’ disbelief. This response is an effort to discredit the testimony of the vicious. Wrongdoers, he suggests, both (1) are miserable and (2) mistakenly believe themselves to live good lives. But, Socrates will maintain, their self-report of happiness cannot be believed, for their ability to accurately assess the quality of their own lives is ruined by their unhealthy psychologies. Despite what they may think, they are *ἄθλιος*. Even if they take themselves to be content, they are in fact wretched and miserable. For in those with seriously unhealthy souls, “everything is warped and nothing is straight” (525a), with the result that they have a *distorted* view of the world and of what is good for them. The upshot of this is that the vicious person’s self-assessment of her own life—and of her own contentment or misery—is inaccurate.

[67] This seems strikingly odd. How could a person fail to realize that she is badly off and miserable? But there is robust evidence of precisely such a belief in Plato’s work. In the first place, consider the characterization of Callicles and Socrates’ own assessment of the young politician. Confronted with Socrates’ initial arguments in favor of self-control, in the Myth of the Water Carriers and the Image of the Leaky Jars, Calli-

44. See Dodds (1959, *ad loc*) for comment on the identity of the bird.

cles dismisses the thought out of hand—he does not seem to be able to register the possibility that self-control might be valuable. And as Socrates argues on, Callicles continues to resist persuasion. And then, at one critical point Socrates gives his own direct assessment of what is going on:

CALLICLES: I don't know, Socrates—in a way you seem to me to be right, but the thing that happens to most people (τῶν πολλῶν) has happened to me: I'm not really persuaded by you.⁴⁵

SOCRATES: It's your love of the people, Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me. (513c)

The “love of the *dêmos*” here can be understood as Callicles' love of power. And in light of the connection between love of power and service to appetite that Plato has drawn since the beginning of the text, Socrates' meaning is clear: there is some appetitive drive in Callicles' soul that stands in the way of his ability to see the matter clearly, despite Socrates' arguments.⁴⁶

45. The Greek is rather ambiguous between two senses. οὐ πάνυ σοι πείθομαι could be rendered in either of the following ways: (1) “I'm not really persuaded by you”; (2) “I'm *completely* unpersuaded by you!” In context I prefer the former, with its hint of self-doubt, but either will do to make the point. If anything, the latter would make the point more clearly!

46. This is not a new suggestion with regard to Socrates' failure to persuade Callicles. Consider the way in which Jessica Moss situates her discussion of the *Gorgias*, in line with other scholars who have argued, in her words, that “by pitting Socrates against the passionate and intransigent Callicles, the dialogue implies that rational argument alone cannot sway someone in whom non-rational forces—*erôs*, or non-rational desires in general—are strong.” Moss (2007, p. 230).

Ober (1998) has some especially good discussion of Callicles' love of the *dêmos* and the difficulty of Socratic persuasion in the context of a corrupt culture. Indeed, most of the literature focuses on the *Gorgias* as a challenge to the Socratic hope to achieve moral reform in Athens via his in-

The “Eye of the Soul”

[68] The language of “seeing” clearly that I have used here is Plato’s own language, and it is significant. Let us consider several cases of such language in the dialogues. To begin with the *Gorgias*, recall Socrates’ comment to Polus that wrongdoers who do anything to avoid being disciplined are like those who are irrationally afraid of painful medical treatment:

They look at (*καθορᾶν*) its painfulness, but are blind to (*τυφλῶς ἔχουσιν*) its benefit and are ignorant of (*ἄγνοεῖν*) how much more miserable it is to live with an unhealthy soul than with an unhealthy body. (479b)

Read by itself, this comment seems only to suggest that these wrongdoers make a mistake in their assessment of discipline or fail to realize its benefits. But when we consider more broadly the way in which Plato habitually uses metaphors of vision and light in describing reasoning capacity and judgment, and consider Callicles’ resistance to persuasion and Socrates’ diagnosis thereof, the comment takes on a different note: it is not just that these wrongdoers *fail to perceive* the benefits of discipline; it is that they are *blind* to these benefits in a stronger sense: there is something about the vicious person’s psyche that renders her *unable* to correctly assess the question of what would be good for her soul.

[69] Of course, the description of judgment as the soul’s “vision” is especially well-known from the *Republic*. It is the organizing metaphor

dividual philosophical argumentation and persuasion. The argument here suggests one of the major barriers facing Socrates. But it is important that nothing here relies on a psychology that is wildly new when compared to the other Socratic dialogues (the most frequent mistake in the literature on this count).

of the Divided Line (*Rep.* VI.506d–511e) and the Myth of the Cave (*Rep.* VII.514a–521b). In the language of the *Republic*, the “eye of the soul” is its capacity for understanding (*voûs*), and this capacity must be redirected toward the world of the forms and led to knowledge through dialectic.⁴⁷ But the language of vision and light for understanding is also present in the Socratic dialogues; for example, in the rather direct way in which Plato uses the light of dawn in the *Protagoras* to underscore the point at which Socrates brings the young Hippocrates to see the error in his over-eagerness to study with Protagoras (*Prot.* 310b, 311a, 312a).

[70] Or for an interesting but rather obscure use of the metaphor, consider the vivid speech on “Zalmoxian medicine” that Socrates gives, half in jest, at the beginning of the *Charmides* (155e–157c).⁴⁸ Here, at Critias’ suggestion, Socrates pretends to be a doctor with a cure to the headache that Charmides has been complaining about. When Charmides asks for the cure, Socrates answers that he has a drug along with a “charm” (*ἐπωδή*) and that they must be taken together, for the drug alone would be “no benefit” to the boy. He then unreels an elaborate speech in critique of Greek medicine that he claims to have had from a Thracian disciple of the god-king Zalmoxis. Good doctors confronted with an eye

47. The image of the “eye of the soul” is the clear implication throughout *Republic* VI–VII and is stated directly at *Rep.* VII.533cd and 518c. (Generally speaking, in addition to the Divided Line and the Cave, we might look at VI.484b–d, 506cd.)

48. I do not here venture to give an interpretation of the passage on its own terms or in context of the *Charmides*, though I can say that my understanding of the passage is influenced especially by Tuozzo (2001). I should note that translations of the *Charmides* depart significantly from the Sprague translation found in Cooper (1997), which is unfortunately rather misleading here.

problem “say that they cannot undertake to cure the eyes by themselves, but that it will be necessary to treat the head at the same time if things are also to fare well with the eyes.” And, Socrates continues, the same relation applies between the head and the body, so that “to ever think to treat the head by itself apart from the whole body would be very foolish.” Socrates extends the notion to encompass the “whole” of the body and soul considered together. One must not attempt to heal the body apart from the soul, “since if the whole is not in good condition, it is impossible that the part should fare well.” The critique is summarized: “this is the error among human beings nowadays, that they set about being doctors separately for each, for σωφροσύνη and for bodily health.” And so, Socrates claims, the Thracian has enjoined him to avoid the error of Greek doctors and to never administer the herb (for the body) without first applying the incantation (for the soul).

[71] What is striking about this medical speech, when read in light of our argument here, is what it implies about the “eye of the soul.” Plato’s usual body-soul analogy suggests to his reader that she ought to reproduce, in the case of the soul, a set of claims like the one that Socrates makes with regard to bodily health. Socrates’ Zalmoxian interlocutor has announced that a disease of the eyes cannot be cured without attending to the head and, indeed, to the whole body. When we translate the claim to the case of the soul, Plato is suggesting—obscurely—that the “eye” of the soul cannot hold in good condition unless the soul as a whole is healthy.⁴⁹ And this is precisely what I have suggested we find in the *Gorgias*:

49. This is especially intriguing in view of the often-remarked oddity of the *Charmides*, that its long discussion of σωφροσύνη is comically devoid, on the surface, of the traditional understanding of the virtue as control of

that unless the soul as a whole is well-cared for, with the appetitive part disciplined and kept under control, the “eye of the soul”—the soul’s capacity for good judgment—will not function properly. Rather, it will be corrupted by the strong appetites rampant in a disordered soul.

2.5.3 The Mistake that the Wrongdoer Makes

[72] We have already rejected the thought that the wrongdoer’s distorted judgment is an impairment of instrumental reasoning. But how should we understand the flaw in judgment instead? If Plato is suggesting, in the *Gorgias* and in other Socratic dialogues, that the ability to correctly answer questions of happiness and misery depends upon the state of one’s soul and one’s appetites, such that the undisciplined wrongdoer cannot come to a clear understanding of the matter, then how is the

appetites. Contrast with Socrates’ straightforward initial description of self-rule (which is equated with *σωφροσύνη*) in the *Gorgias* as “nothing fancy—just what the Many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself” (491de).

On the role of self-control in the *Charmides*, consider Kahn (1998, p. 188): “We should not miss the philosophic significance of Plato’s depiction of the disruptive impact of sensual emotion upon Socrates in his glimpse of Charmides’ private parts, and the consequent effort required for him to regain rational control (156d). Like the emphasis on steadfastness (*karteria*) in the *Laches*, this dramatic presentation of the moral emotions stands in what seems to be a deliberate contrast with the ‘intellectualist’ tendency in both dialogues to identify virtue with some form of knowledge. Whatever the speakers in these two dialogues may imply, the author of the *Charmides* and *Laches* is certainly attentive to the importance of the emotions in any full account of the mortal life.”

To this, contrast Rowe (2007, p. 47): “... contrast the treatment of self-control in the *Charmides*, which manages without a single reference anywhere to control of irrational desire and impulses; contrast the treatment of courage in the *Laches*, which has rather little time for the idea of it as any sort of irrational *disposition*.” — But, we might add, just because the dialogues have “little time for” such ideas hardly means that they do not have a significant role to play!

reader supposed to understand this imagery in more concrete terms? Or put another way, what exactly is the error in the vicious person's judgment and how is this error one that Socrates might plausibly suppose to be possible when it comes to something that seems so accessible, the question of one's own contentment or lack thereof? How is it that the wrongdoer goes wrong here and how does her error render her resistant to Socratic persuasion?

[73] The first thing to note here is the nature of the specific question that Socrates supposes the wrongdoer is unable to answer correctly. The question of whether one's life is a good and successful one is a question about *εὐδαιμονία* and *ἀθλιότης*. As is often pointed out about Greek ideas of *εὐδαιμονία*, however, the concept is rather more demanding than "happiness" in a simple sense, rising rather to the level of a judgment of success in living what is, on the whole, a good and successful life.⁵⁰

[74] And in the *Gorgias* we find Socrates, throughout his conversation with Callicles, allowing for the scenario of a person who enjoys himself and yet is not *εὐδαίμων*: in the Image of the Leaky Jars, where Socrates does not deny that the person with the unhealthy soul experiences pleasure but only claims that it is short-lived; with the man with the itch and his companion characters (494b–495b); in the argument about pleasure as filling-up with which Socrates pushes Callicles. The point of all this is simply that, even within a hedonistic framework—which is the

50. For a quick example, consider the general way in which Aristotle talks about *εὐδαιμονία* in *EN* I (apart from his specific conception thereof). It is a judgment that must be made of a *complete* life (*EN* I.1098a15, 1100a10–1101a20, cf. Herodotus I.32) and even when a man is dead the fortunes of his children might be said, in a sense, to be relevant to the question of whether his life was one of *εὐδαιμονία* (*EN* I.1101a20–1101b5).

ground on which many of Socrates' arguments against Callicles' ideal of appetite-service take place—the question of whether or not one's life is a good one is a question about one's life *overall*, not about one's in-the-moment experience of pleasure or pain.

[75] Once we reframe the question here, it becomes rather less puzzling to ask how the undisciplined wrongdoer might mistake the quality of her own life and falsely believe that it is a good one. For when we view the question as one about the overall quality of life rather than about momentary pleasure and pain we are able to say something about how such a mistake might be possible. For the wrongdoer could very well mistake the overall balance of pleasure and pain in her own life, as compared to other possible lives, and believe herself to be doing well in comparison when, in reality, she could be much better off.

[76] To explain the phenomenon of the wrongdoer making such a mistake (and so, of his interlocutors' resistance to persuasion), Socrates may intend to suggest that as the appetites of the undisciplined person increase she becomes so afflicted with the experience of strong desire, so disordered and dominated by her apparent "needs," that she simply *cannot imagine* any other way of being. This, then, would explain why someone like Archelaus could consider himself happy even when, from an outsider's perspective, his life may seem objectively miserable. For from his own perspective, distorted by appetite, the constant scramble after the next desire *just is* what he human life looks like. And on such a vision, the most successful life will be the life of the tyrant, with the power and resources to effectively chase each appetite as it comes along. But to anyone not so warped by desire, such a toilsome life, even if apparently "successful" in its toils, will seem bizarre and miserable and

hardly one that a clear-thinking person would choose for herself.

[77] It is true, then, that the harm to the vicious person's soul does harm her deliberative capacity. But what she becomes worse and worse at deliberating *about*, specifically, is not the instrumental question of how best to achieve her wicked ends. Rather, she becomes worse and worse at thinking clearly about the specific question of the objective quality of her life in comparison with other possible ways of living, the state of her psychological health, and the relation between the two. And this is perfectly clear from both the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*.⁵¹

2.6 Conclusion: Psychology, Ethics, and Politics

[78] So goes Socrates' argument that the successful wrongdoer will be miserable, even if she does not realize it. This appetite-centered account of the misery of indiscipline and injustice provides the most plausible interpretation of the *Gorgias* and of Socratic ethics generally. Specifically of interest are the following key claims: (1) that it is never in one's interest to do injustice, even if apparently successful, because doing wrong will make one miserable; (2) that the wrongdoer is miserable specifically because her soul is in a poor state, as described; (3) that action reinforces appetite, creating the threat of the vicious circle; (4) that having

51. Consider, for instance, the important description of wisdom and the virtuous person at *Republic* IV: "And when he does anything, whether acquiring wealth, taking care of his body, engaging in politics, or in private contracts—in all of these, he believes that the action is just and fine that preserves this inner harmony and helps achieve it, and calls it so, and regards as wisdom the knowledge that oversees such actions. And he believes that the action that destroys this harmony is unjust, and calls it so, and regards the belief that oversees it as ignorance" (*Rep.* IV.443c–e).

an unhealthy soul distorts one's perspective on questions of human happiness, even when it comes to evaluating one's own life. It will be helpful, in conclusion, to consider the implications of these claims for our understanding of Socratic ethics and politics.

2.6.1 The Target to Look to in Living

[79] The arguments reviewed in this chapter have significant consequences for Socratic ethics. Consider in particular the following passage, which comes in one of Socrates' recaps of and exhortations regarding the ethical argument of the *Gorgias*:

And if this is true, then, it seems, anyone who wants to be happy must pursue self-control and train himself in it (διωκτέον καὶ ἀσκητέον). We must flee from indiscipline (ἀκολασία), each of us as fast as our feet will carry us, and must above all make sure that we have no need of discipline (τοῦ κολλάζεσθαι). But if anyone does have need of it, either a man himself or those near to him, either a private citizen or a whole city, then the penalty must be applied and they must be disciplined (κολαστέον), if they are to be happy. This, I think, is the target we should look to in living, straining in all of our own efforts and in those of our city toward this—how justice and self-control will come to be present in one who would be blessed. *This* is how we should act. We shouldn't live by allowing our appetites to be undisciplined (ἀκολάστους) and attempting to fill them up—an unending trouble (ἀνήνυτον κακόν)—, living the life of a marauder. Such a person could not be dear to anyone, either to another human being or to a god, for he cannot act as a partner (κοινωνεῖν), and where there is no partnership there can be no friendship ... [But] you suppose that we must train ourselves in acquisitiveness and in taking advantage of others (πλεονεξίαν ... ἀσκεῖν). (507c–508a)⁵²

52. Context for the passage: The question of politics and the success or failure of revered Athenian politicians comes up at 501d–503d. Socrates begins the examination with an argument about health of the soul 503e–505b.

And in Socrates' final exhortation to Callicles, that concludes the dialogue, he warns that "every form of pandering, both concerning oneself and concerning others ... must be avoided" (527c) and urges Callicles: "So let us then take this argument as our guide, the one that has now been revealed to us, the one that shows us that this way of life is the best one: to live and to die in the practice of (*ἀσκοῦντας*) justice and the rest of virtue" (527e).

[80] In view of the psychological theory of the *Gorgias*, these passages suggest that the main ethical point of the dialogue—and, I would suggest, of Socratic ethical exhortation in general—is a claim about how we ought to relate to ourselves and to our appetites. Desires are experienced as good and worthy of pursuing: they promise pleasure if attended to and threaten pain if denied. But Socrates insists that adopting the servile and indiscriminate stance toward our appetites that the rhetoricians suggest, and that is the fundamental fact of their rhetorical practice,⁵³ will only lead to misery. Instead, he argues, we must be critical of our desires, interrogating them and considering carefully whether it would be good to satisfy them.⁵⁴ What we must always avoid—what will

Callicles won't go along, and so Socrates continues on his own with a recap and exhortation regarding the ethical conclusions of the argument that runs 505c–509c before returning to politics at 509c with the question of how to protect oneself.

Translation mine, based largely on Zeyl but drawing on Fowler and a bit of Griffith to help capture the high color of Socrates' moral exhortation.

53. The "trick" or "device" that rhetoric uses to persuade (459bc), unspecified through Gorgias and Polus conversations, comes out in the Callicles conversation as appealing to the prejudices and immediate desires of the audience, especially their desire to think well of themselves. See especially 484c–485a, 513a–c, 513d, 515bc, 517bc.

54. Consider the striking line from the *Phaedrus* in which Socrates rejects the

make us wretched and miserable, as individuals and as a city—is “pan-dering to ourselves.”

[81] What is especially important here is the implication of the claim that the vicious person suffers from distorted judgment about what is actually good for her and will be resistant to argument in favor of correct ethical conclusions. So we have reason to think that, on the Socratic framework, the discipline of appetite is a necessary condition for acquiring ethical knowledge, prerequisite to whatever “knowledge of good and bad” is possible for human beings.⁵⁵

[82] This is particularly interesting for the way in which this shifts the emphasis in our understanding of Socratic ethics away from *knowledge* and toward *self-control*. For if it is true that self-control is necessary for knowledge and (so) for happiness, then it can serve as a proximate goal or heuristic in deliberating about how we ought to act. This is reflected in the persistent language of “training in” virtue (*ἀσκεῖν*) that runs through the conversation with Callicles.⁵⁶

sophistic game of “rationalizing” myths. “I don’t have time for that sort of thing,” he tells Phaedrus, “and here’s why: I’m still unable to know myself, as the Delphic inscription says, and it really strikes me as ridiculous to examine other alien matters while I’m still ignorant of this. And so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary beliefs about them, as I was saying just now, I don’t examine that sort of thing but rather I examine myself, to see whether I’m some beast more complex and furious than Typhon or whether I’m a tamer and simpler creature with a share in some divine and gentle nature” (*Phdr.* 229e–230a).

55. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith (2012, p. 247).

56. This is contrasted with Callicles’ belief that we ought to “train ourselves in acquisitiveness and in taking advantage of others (*πλεονεξίαν ... ἀσκεῖν*)” (508a). The persistent use of *ἀσκεῖν* is telling. In its basic sense the word seems to mean to work as raw materials, and hence: “practice, exercise, train ... properly of athletic exercise” (LSJ s.v., *ἀσκέω*).

2.6.2 Psychology and Politics

[83] These arguments about psychology and ethics also have significant consequences for Socratic politics. Consider, with the previous, the depiction of the ambitious young man who trains himself to become “of like character” to whomever has power in the city and, in doing so, ruins his soul. Recall too Callicles’ worry that the Many “shape” or “mold” the youth through the “charms and incantations” of praise and blame (483e–484a). This is a suggestive line, and one that I suppose Socrates and Plato are quite interested in; it is a key piece of a political theory that pays close attention to cultural values and how they are transmitted. If it is the case that those whose souls are in bad shape come to have a distorted view of what is good for them and, despite their misery, prove resistant to persuasion and attempts at reform, then Socratic ethics and politics will be very interested in how to prevent that initial corruption.

[84] But this suggests something interesting about Socratic politics: that on such a theory as Socrates is offering, the philosopher has every reason to care about training appetite as a goal in itself, through non-rational means just as much as through argumentation. For action shapes appetite, which in turn influences judgment. This suggests that there will be benefit from correct action and harm from incorrect action whether or not the actor acts in full knowledge of the reasons that make an action right or wrong.⁵⁷ It is in the agent’s interest to act rightly, even

Compare the description of the ancient sages “training in” Spartan wisdom (*ἀσκήσειν τὴν σοφίαν*) in Socrates’ sketch of a philosophical Sparta at *Protagoras* 342a–343c.

57. This is not to suggest that the actor’s cognitive state is a matter of indifference (as Brickhouse and Smith (1994, p. 133) do well to point out). On the

short of knowledge.⁵⁸

[85] The upshot here is a Socratic defense of mythic, charismatic, or other non-rational forms of persuasion both as a propaedeutic and as a second-best form of education. If these can provide, in the language of the *Meno*, a useful way of “tying down” a conclusion about the correct way to act, then they will be a useful (perhaps even necessary?) tool for ethical and political practice. While a concern for cultural education and an interest in myth-making is quite familiar in Plato’s work, it is not always recognized that non-rational persuasion plays a role in the Socratic dialogues, too—it is not an innovation by “Platonic” Plato when non-rational persuasion shows up in the *Republic*.⁵⁹ But it is clear now that Socrates’

contrary, if the main point of Socrates’ exhortation is how we ought to relate to our appetites, then facts about the agent’s internal state will make a significant difference in whether the action performed is beneficial or harmful! But there is nothing to suggest, e.g., that acting from mythically-induced belief is in itself harmful (while admitting that acting from knowledge would be better, for various practical reasons such as come out of the *Meno*).

58. This helps explain one rather odd fact about the *Gorgias*, that in its interest at getting to the psychological argument the standard Socratic theme of the necessity of knowledge is expressed rather obscurely. Knowledge, so centrally important to Socrates’ ethical argument as given, e.g., in the *Euthydemus*, the *Meno*, and the *Charmides*, is here almost relegated to the background, assumed in the general talk of “intelligence” with Polus and in general reference to Socrates’ quarter-scheme of beneficent crafts and pandering knacks (463a–465a). This general orientation toward *self-control* over *knowledge* is especially intriguing for the role it suggests for correct opinion. If Polus is to submit his soul to the refutation as to a doctor (475d), the “cure” he would receive if persuaded, that would put his soul in better condition, hardly looks like *knowledge*, given the shallow *ad hominem* nature of the arguments that Socrates offers him—rather, it looks like it would be something much closer to a catechetical correct belief. (Perhaps compare to the end of the *Meno*.)
59. E.g., Penner (2000, p. 164)’s contention that on the Socratic view “*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one’s fellow citizens” (original emphasis). Klosko (2006) makes such a belief the center of his idea of Socratic

argument about health of the soul, central to his basic ethical commitments, undeniably points in such a direction. Put another way, we find Socrates playing the sorcerer throughout the Socratic dialogues; we now have an explanation for the characterization.

[86] As a final note, it is worth mentioning that many scholars have recognized that one lesson of the *Gorgias* is that, as Ober puts it, the Socratic attempt to persuade his fellow-citizens to virtue will prove ineffectual in “the established ideological context” of a corrupt culture.⁶⁰ But it is not always recognized that the *Gorgias* itself contains no argument at all about how culture comes to be corrupted, and no clear argument or conclusion about democracy as such and whether or not it will (inevitably?) tend toward corruption. Rather, the dialogue only contains a criticism of Athens, this particular corrupt democracy.⁶¹

[87] But for the purpose of this chapter, we may leave open the larger question of the political conclusion of the Socratic dialogues considered as a whole. The important point here is that the claims and questions considered in this chapter are unavoidable and resolve longstanding difficulties with Socratic ethics and politics. Any attempt to construct a full picture of Socratic ethics and politics, then, will be forced to grapple with them. And I hope to have established a reasonable account of Socrates’

politics.

60. Ober (1998, p. 213).

61. This explains some of the baffling divergence in the literature. Some scholars see the political criticism and wrongly assume it *must* be a criticism of democracy as such; other scholars recognize that the criticism is contextual and assume that, therefore, *no* criticism of democracy as such is implied. Compare, for instance, Ober (1998), Tarnopolsky (2010), Euben (1994), Stauffer (2006), etc.

arguments and one that will be useful for such further exploration. I will close by suggesting, however, that the Socratic dialogues do contain a complete argument against democracy that is more or less what we are familiar with from the *Republic*, and that the argument here about the misery of the wrongdoer and the distortion of judgment by vice stands as a critical piece of that political effort.⁶²

62. To see how this goes, consider the essential mistake of Ober (1998) when it comes to the *Gorgias*: to assume that a criticism of *Athens* must be a criticism of *democracy*. But when we answer the question of whether democracy itself tends towards corruption—see the *Protagoras* chapter—we see that the *Gorgias* does not represent a new political position for Plato: he argues against democracy from the beginning.

The *Charmides* suggests a basic problem with any arrangement in which moral non-experts have ultimate control over politics and culture but does not resolve the question; the *Gorgias*, in supplying the answer to what Socrates means when he speaks of “health of the soul” and when he claims that the wrongdoer will be miserable, supplies an important moral psychology; the *Protagoras* offers the institutional argument against free society. Put these together, we have Kallipolis.

3 | Peddlers of Praise: Plato's *Protagoras* Against Democracy

3.1 Introduction

[1] There is no satisfactory interpretation of Plato's *Protagoras* in the current literature. Almost without exception, interpretations of the dialogue focus on the contrast drawn between Socrates and the sophists, understanding this contrast as a disagreement about certain theoretical commitments that produces, in consequence, a divergence in philosophical method, considered at the personal level.¹ And such a critique of Protagoras is undeniably a major effort of the text.² But it is not the full story. What goes unnoticed in the literature is that, in drawing this

-
1. See Adam and Adam (1893), Jaeger (1943), Vlastos (1956), Friedländer (1964), Taylor (1991), Schofield (1992), Rutherford (1995), Burnyeat (2013).
 2. Reacting against this theme in the literature, Gagarin (1969) and Corey (2015) argue that Plato does not draw as complete a contrast between Socrates and Protagoras as most scholars seem to assume. This is also true, although Gagarin goes too far in suggesting that “the dialogue portrays the two teachers as equals” (Gagarin, 1969, p. 136n11); Corey is on firmer ground: “my point,” he states, “is not to assimilate the two or to deny that a fundamental purpose of Plato's *Protagoras* is to lead readers to differentiate Socrates from Protagoras in a critical fashion” (Corey, 2015, p. 39).

contrast, Plato is also advancing an argument about *politics*.³ My aim here is to bring out this neglected aspect of the *Protagoras* in support of a more complete understanding of the dialogue.⁴

[2] This effort is not only relevant for our understanding of the *Protagoras* itself, but also has significant consequences for our understanding of the political outlook of Plato's Socratic dialogues as a whole. Against some commonplaces about Socratic politics, this chapter demonstrates that the *Protagoras*—often taken to be the paradigmatically “Socratic”

-
3. Two treatments of the dialogue deserve particular mention. Carson (1992) offers an insightful treatment of Simonides that approaches the argument that I will offer. She is quite right to suggest that at issue in the dialogue is the possibility that the praise-poet might create misleading or false public structures of praise and blame, e.g. Carson (1992, p. 116, 120). But it is not clear to me whether she takes the dialogue to diagnose and criticize a general social problem (as opposed to a problem with Simonides and Protagoras themselves) and if so, what the nature of that problem might be—and in any case she does not detect a *political* or *institutional* argument of the sort that I will demonstrate.

Also deserving of mention, Beresford (2009)—drawing on Beresford (2008)—argues that the Simonides episode is animated by Plato's sharp disagreement with the idea expressed in Simonides' poem, an idea that is “powerfully democratic in its implications” (Beresford, 2009, p. 212). While Beresford's treatment of the episode is helpful, it misses the main political argument of the text. This chapter focuses on that argument—rather than a suggestion arising by implication from a claim about moral psychology and ethics, Plato takes direct aim at political institutions and processes.

We can see that Beresford's argument must be incomplete, and indicate the direction of my own discussion, when we notice that in his telling, the “philosophical unity of the dialogue” encompasses only the Great Speech, the Simonides episode, and the final argument about *akrasia* (Beresford, 2009, p. 214), while taking no account of the elaborate framing devices with which Plato introduces the reader to the “main” conversation.

4. I have no objection to Friedländer's warning: “This dialogue, the richest among [Plato's] early works, cannot be grasped by isolating a single element and making it the basis for an interpretation of the whole” (Friedländer, 1964, p. 36). I do not attempt a holistic interpretation of the *Protagoras* here; rather, I am content to bring out a previously unrecognized aspect of the text.

Socratic dialogue—both (1) advances a serious argument about political institutions⁵ and (2) comes to a thoroughly antidemocratic conclusion.

[3] In brief, the demonstration centers on bringing out the neglected political implications of the text's theme of *praise* and *reputation*. The argument advanced in the dialogue is that free society proves unable to maintain a morally salutary system of education; even should a free society begin with a perfectly virtuous culture, the operations of unscrupulous "peddlers of praise" such as Protagoras and Simonides will undermine that virtuous culture and set up bad ideals that ambitious youth will strive to emulate. Considering this problem, Socrates' parody of a "philosophical Sparta" suggests that a solution may be found in the control of poetry, a suggestion that we find developed at great length in the *Republic*. Accordingly, this demonstration not only revises the near-universal reading of the *Protagoras* as concerned only with individual matters but also forces us to reevaluate our general understanding of the political argument of Plato's early work.

3.2 Education and Socialization

3.2.1 Protagoras' Great Speech

[4] It is an odd feature of the *Protagoras* that the core of Socrates' political argument is not directly expressed by Socrates himself. Rather, it is put

5. This aspect of the chapter's effort might be understood as a third wave rejecting Vlastos's insistence that Socrates is "exclusively a moral philosopher." Benson (2000) resists this by showing that the Socratic dialogues contain epistemological work; Prior (2013) resists this by showing that the Socratic dialogues contain metaphysical work. Now I aim to show that they contain serious political work as well.

in the mouth of his opponent, in the elaborate theory of education as socialization that Protagoras unveils as part of his Great Speech (320d–328d). As follows (325d–326e):

From a very early age, as soon as a boy can understand words, his caretakers strive “for him to be as good as he possibly can,” teaching and demonstrating “in every word and deed” that “this is just, that is unjust; this is noble, that is shameful; this is pious, that impious—do these things, don’t do those” (325c5–d5).⁶ If the boy obeys, well and good. If not, they “straighten him out” with threats and blows (325d5–7). Later, they send him to school and tell his teachers to take care for his good behavior, which they do. When he can read, his grammar teacher gives him “the works of good poets” and compels him to memorize these, “in which there are many admonitions and many descriptions and praises and encomiums (ἔπαινοι καὶ ἐγκώμια) of good men of old, so that the child might eagerly imitate (ζηλῶν μιμῆται) [these men] and long to become such (ὀρέγεται τοιοῦτος γενέσθαι)” (325d7–326a4).⁷ From there, the lyre teacher, with whom the boys learn “the works of other good poets” as well as rhythm and harmony, “so that they become more civilized, and their speech and movements become more rhythmical and harmonious” (326a4–b6). Then to the gymnastics trainer. Finally, when the young men have left school, “the city in turn compels them to learn the laws and to model their lives on them” so that they will not act “at random” as they happen to be inclined but will follow the *nomoi*, the “discoveries of good law-givers of old,” as a child learning to write follows the tracings of his teacher (326c3–6).⁸ And if a young man transgresses the *nomoi* he is

6. Citations to Plato are to the *Protagoras* unless otherwise noted. Translations of the *Protagoras* mostly use the Lombardo and Bell translation, in Cooper (1997), with occasional modification or substitution of my own translations. Significant variations will be pointed out in notes.

7. Translation mine, to better highlight the operation of praise and the eager desire to imitate. Contrast Lombardo and Bell: “works that contain numerous exhortations, many passages describing in glowing terms good men of old, so that the child is inspired to imitate them and become like them.”

8. “Good lawgivers of old” for ἀγαθῶν καὶ παλαιῶν νομοθετῶν preserves the

punished, and this punishment is called "setting straight."

[5] So goes Protagoras' three-stage account of cultural education. At each stage, certain ideals and persons who embody them are praised and held up to the youth as models that ought to be eagerly imitated, while the contraries are blamed and deviation is corrected by punishment. The sophist's speech continues for a ways, but when he wraps up Socrates certainly seems impressed with what he has heard. He describes himself as "entranced" (*κεκηλημένος*), "still eager to listen," having some trouble "pulling [himself] together" (328d). He sincerely thanks the young Hippocrates who has dragged him to see Protagoras: "How grateful I am to you for encouraging me (*προύτρεις*) to come here. I'm very glad to have heard from Protagoras what I have just heard. For previously I used to think that there was no human effort (*ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν*) by which the good become good, but now I am persuaded that there is" (328de).

[6] Socrates' praise of Protagoras and thanks for Hippocrates is not merely ironic.⁹ As Michael Gagarin comments: "Why does Plato let Protagoras make such a long and convincing speech if he disagrees with the

parallel with the *παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν* praised by the poets; the parallel is rather obscured in Lombardo and Bell's "great lawgivers in the past."

9. The moment has additional weight for the way in which it complicates the characterization of Socrates. Rutherford (1995, p. 124) is quite right to point out that the Hippocrates conversation makes plain that Socrates had no interest of his own in visiting Protagoras: he "has known about [Protagoras' presence in Athens] for longer [than Hippocrates], and appears unmoved and disinclined to lose sleep over it." But after Protagoras' speech, Socrates is genuinely thankful to Hippocrates for prompting him to come. (Incidentally, Socrates' initial disinterest shows the error in Bartlett (2003, p. 613)'s suggestion that Socrates has no real interest in Hippocrates and only goes to see Protagoras for his own purposes. On the contrary, it is Hippocrates who quite literally wakes Socrates up to the need to see Protagoras.)

arguments presented in it but never attacks them? ... [On the contrary, Plato] wants his reader to read, consider, and accept these arguments.”¹⁰ While the Great Speech does have its shortcomings in Socrates’ view, and while he will go on to push Protagoras toward the unity of virtue in knowledge, the fact that he may believe education strictly as socialization to be *insufficient* for true virtue by no means indicates that he would think such an education to be *irrelevant* or *unimportant* to the question of how citizens come to be virtuous or vicious.¹¹

3.2.2 Hippocrates the Student

[7] Although Socrates does not himself directly express or explicitly endorse the theory of socialization that Protagoras presents, the dialogue makes it clear that he understands it and believes it to be true. For we see him acting deliberately on the basis of precisely such a theory in his early-morning conversation with Hippocrates (310b–314c), and his arguments later in the dialogue will also be situated in context of such a theory.¹²

10. Gagarin (1969, p. 145).

11. So we see Plato insisting throughout his work (1) that such socialization is an inevitable feature of human society, (2) that it therefore plays an important role in moral education, and (3) that on its own it is insufficient to achieve true virtue. Consider the musical and philosophical education in Kallipolis, or the claim in the *Laws* that the best education needs a private or individual component in addition to whatever large-scale socialization will take place (a tutorial in addition to the lecture, perhaps; *Laws* II.666e–667a, including an unwilling pupil noticeably similar to the one dragged upward from the Cave).

As Corey (2015, p. 62n41) points out, Socrates’ language of ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν here has its parallels in the *Apology* (24cd, 29d–30b).

12. This fact is significant. Klosko (2006, p. 28n46) suggests in passing that, while the Great Speech may present an educational theory that looks for-

[8] A brief description of the Hippocrates conversation is in order. The boy comes charging into Socrates' home before dawn, worked up and "all aflutter" (τὴν πτοίησιν, 310d), full of oaths to the gods. He has just discovered that Protagoras is in town, and has come to recruit Socrates for a visit to the traveling teacher. Why such a rush?, asks Socrates, Surely Protagoras hasn't *wronged* you? Hippocrates laughs and shoots back, "By the gods, Socrates, he has, at least in this respect: he alone is wise and he isn't making me so!" (310d). Socrates suggests they wait for a more decent hour and pass the time in conversation.

[9] As Socrates and Hippocrates talk, it soon becomes apparent that Hippocrates does not really know what he is doing. He does not know just

ward to the politics of the *Republic* (in some respects; Klosko does not seem to think the dialogue as a whole tends in that direction, but it is difficult to say from his brief mention), it represents only a comment from *Plato* the author and is not an educational or political theory that *Socrates* the character endorses. This allows Klosko to suggest that the primary political argument of the Socratic dialogues is a "Socratic" vision of politics with the occasional hint from Plato that he wishes to move beyond such a vision. But this reading fails in view of the fact that in the *Protagoras* Socrates himself endorses this educational theory and the antidemocratic political argument based upon it. The political argument of the Socratic dialogues (both from "Socrates" and from Plato) is wholly in anticipation of Kallipolis.

Why, then, should Plato have Socrates present his theory indirectly? Two reasons. First (1), as Corey (2015) and Gagarin (1969) suggest, the dialogue gives Protagoras a much more respectful treatment than many have realized (although the respect is coupled with a harsh critique). Giving Protagoras such a marvelous speech is part of this respectful tribute. Second (2), this apparently odd dodge is actually quite standard Socratic practice: it is just another version of Socrates ventriloquizing his theories into speeches supposedly overheard from "the wise" (as e.g. in the *Meno* or *Symposium*; the purpose of this practice is related to Socrates' deliberately humble stance in conversation, discussed below). The fact that the Great Speech serves as such a demonstration from one of "the wise" has gone unnoticed because scholars have failed to see that Socrates endorses and acts upon the theory of socialization that it presents. (For what it is worth, we might complete the parallel by noting that Socrates is the one who directly speaks the Great Speech, in recounting the conversation to his unnamed companion.)

what he expects in signing up for lessons with Protagoras (311b–312b). He does not even know the nature of Protagoras’ profession (312b–e): although he believes the sophist to be “someone who knows wise things” (312c) and, more specifically, “an expert at making people clever speakers” (312d), he does not really know what Protagoras teaches. So why, then, is the young man so eager to see the sophist? He has never seen Protagoras or heard him speak, “*but it doesn’t matter*, Socrates—everyone praises the man and says that he’s so wise at speaking” (310e4–6, emphasis added).¹³ Hippocrates is a young man in search of an education; the only thing that he knows about Protagoras is that he is praised as wise, but this is enough to make him want to rush off and pay the sophist to make him similarly wise (310de).

[10] Socrates warns Hippocrates that in his eagerness he is about to put his soul in danger without taking the time to think about what he is doing (313a–314b). While Hippocrates would give careful consideration to whether some proposed course of action would be helpful or harmful to his body, “when it comes to something [he] value[s] more than [his] body,” his soul, upon which the question of whether his affairs will go well or badly depends, he does not give his plan much thought (313ab). The soul is nourished on lessons (*μαθήματα*), and the sophist is “a kind of merchant who peddles [such] provisions” (313cd), and one that can’t

13. Translating *ἀλλὰ γάρ, ὦ Σώκρατες, πάντες τὸν ἄνδρα ἐπαινοῦσιν καὶ φασιν σοφώτατον εἶναι λέγειν*. Contrast Lombardo and Bell’s “He’s such a celebrity, Socrates, and everyone says he’s a terribly clever speaker.” Two important points. First (1), The conjunctive *ἀλλὰ γάρ* has the force of “but it doesn’t matter, since ...”: see Denyer (2008, *ad loc.*), with reference to Denniston (1996, pp. 101–102), and compare 336a2. Second (2), “he’s such a celebrity” muddles into obscurity the thematically significant “everyone praises the man.”

be trusted. As Socrates warns Hippocrates:

Be careful, or the sophist might deceive us in praising (ἐπαινῶν) what he sells, the way merchants who market food for the body do. In general, those who market provisions don't know what is good or bad for the body—they just praise (ἐπαινοῦσιν) everything they sell—nor do those who buy (unless one happens to be a trainer or a doctor). In the same way, those who take their teachings from town to town and sell them wholesale or retail to anybody who wants them praise (ἐπαινοῦσιν) all their products, but I wouldn't be surprised, my friend, if some of these people did not know which of their products are beneficial and which detrimental to the soul. Likewise those who buy from them, unless one happens to be a physician of the soul. (313de)¹⁴

[11] The character of Hippocrates, then, quite directly acts out Protagoras' theory of socialization through praise and imitation; accordingly, he represents ambitious young men as a type, not merely an isolated character or one particular individual.¹⁵ Not knowing the first thing about Protagoras, knowing only that the sophist is praised by “everyone,” Hippocrates is willing to spend any sum to make himself like the sophist in whatever respect it is that wins him such acclaim. The question of whether or not it would be good for him to imitate whatever is praised does not even occur to him. Socrates reins him in and raises the

14. Lombardo and Bell's choice of “advertise” and “recommend” for ἐπαινέω is unhelpful.

15. As we shall see, Hippocrates is not the only character in the *Protagoras* who represents a type or plays out a social role. The political argument of the dialogue is to a significant degree advanced through such dramatic means.

This may be one reason why it has gone undetected, despite the literary charm of the dialogue being much-remarked, as e.g. by Jaeger (1943, p. 108): “The entire dialogue is lit with the brilliance of youthful gaiety, it sparkles with humour and dances with whimsical wit, more than any other of Plato's books.”

question of whether the praise that has so influenced Hippocrates can be trusted. While the status of the sophist's teaching is not clear just yet, what we do see for sure in this scene is Socrates adopting and responding to and acting on the basis of a theory of socialization that is only later, from the mouth of Protagoras, made explicit to the reader. There is every reason, then, to think that Plato and Socrates endorse this description of the operation of praise and blame in society.¹⁶

3.3 Socrates v. Protagoras

[12] The political argument of the *Protagoras* is built (1) on the theory of socialization expounded in Protagoras' great speech and acted out by Hippocrates and (2) on the dialogue's critique of Protagoras' competitive conception of argument and the methodological divergence with Socrates that this produces. This section works through second set of considerations.

3.3.1 Protagoras the Sophist

[13] Socrates is not the only character who acts on the basis of this theory of praise and socialization. Protagoras is presented as keenly aware

16. Further indications that Socrates recognizes and acts on the basis of this theory of socialization will emerge as the discussion continues. But for now it may help to point out that, as it happens, the theme of praise and education is announced to the reader in Socrates' very first words in the dialogue: "aren't you a praiser (*ἐπαινέτης*) of Homer, who says ...?" — In other words, "don't you agree with Homer?" — The poet is praised and believed to be a moral authority whose pronouncements are appropriate to endorse and imitate. As Rutherford (1995, p. 123) says regarding the framing conversations (though not with an eye on this theme), "it is common for Plato to introduce a dialogue with key words or word-play or half-serious ideas which gain significance and seriousness as the argument advances."

of his role in this social process, and throughout the dialogue is shown to be exceedingly concerned with maintaining the praise and reputation that bring him wealthy young students like Hippocrates—so concerned, in fact, that he is willing to say just anything to avoid being publicly discredited. But insofar as Protagoras, like Hippocrates, serves to represent a type, the critique of Protagoras will function to reveal the political problem that the dialogue is concerned with.

[14] To begin, consider Protagoras' first question to Socrates and Hippocrates: "Do you want to talk with me alone or with others present?" (316b). He follows up with a long speech on the genealogy of sophistry, focusing on the traveling teacher's need for caution about his reputation lest he engender ill-will, and says that he would like to give his speech in front of everyone in the house (316c–317c). Socrates surmises that Protagoras "want[s] to show off" in front of his rival sophists and the others present (including potential students), and arranges for a public conversation (317d).

[15] The shift from a private conversation to a public display fundamentally shapes not just the immediately following exchange,¹⁷ but the

17. It is often pointed out that Protagoras does not quite manage a convincing answer to Socrates' theoretical challenge, and that his account of education as socialization into basic values of fairness could hardly serve to address the question of the skills of Pericles: e.g. Taylor (1991, p. xii), Friedländer (1964, pp. 14–18), Rutherford (1995, pp. 128–129). There is good reason to think, however, that this slippage is intentional on Protagoras' part. In light of his first speech—made privately—on the need for caution (316c–317c), Socrates' public question presents a rhetorical as well as a theoretical challenge. Corey (2015) gives an excellent explanation of the double challenge: "How can Protagoras show that political ability can be taught without, at the same time, implying that the Athenian Assembly is unwise and that the elite parents of Athens are pedagogically incompetent?" (Corey, 2015, p. 44). The crux of Protagoras' strategic response lies in his deliberate suppression, in the Great Speech, of the elite political leadership

whole of the dialogue from this point. The primary consequence of the shift to public display is that Protagoras comes to view the conversation not as a cooperative conversation in pursuit of the truth but rather as a verbal contest in pursuit of praise. This is made explicit in the breakdown of the conversation that is located at the center of the dialogue.

[16] Socrates' examination of Protagoras begins to break down the very moment that his questions begin to trap Protagoras in a contradiction (333ab). The sophist becomes irritated (333b), attempts to avoid answering (333d), lets out an oath to the gods in his heatedness (333e). Socrates sees that Protagoras is angry and modifies his tone, but to no avail—the sophist unleashes a speech on the complexity of what is advantageous (334a–c) that serves to obscure the issue at hand and to win him rowdy applause from audience (334c, ἀνεθορύβησαν).

[17] In response to this obfuscating effort, Socrates makes his usual request for short answers and Protagoras replies with a very revealing comment. “Socrates,” he says, “I have gone into verbal contests (ἀγῶνα λόγων) with many people, and if I were to accede to your request and do

that his initial promise to teach ἐβουλία alludes to (for which see Corey p. 42, citing Schofield (1999)). The strategy: “While Protagoras alludes to leadership,” the Great Speech “suppresses this aspect of political life. Politics is presented as if it were *nothing but* justice and respect, capacities that almost all humans share” (Corey, 2015, p. 51). This need not suggest that Protagoras is secretly anti-democratic, only that he chooses to emphasize certain facts about democratic politics for reason of rhetorical context (Corey, 2015, p. 59).

See also Rutherford (1995, p. 128)'s insightful comment (though not one that is worked out there) that the Great Speech “needs to be seen as a response to a particular set of questions in a specific place: had Protagoras not been in democratic Athens but (say) in an oligarchy, he might have had an easier case to present, for he could have discounted the proposition that all men possess some degree of political *arete* and declared Athenian practice misguided.”

as my opponent demanded, I would not be thought superior to anyone, nor would Protagoras be a name to be reckoned with among the Greeks” (335a). As Malcolm Schofield says, the sophist “could scarcely have given a clearer articulation of a competitive conception of argument” here;¹⁸ This competitive conception of argument stands in stark contrast to Socrates’ typical claim not to be chasing victory in his conversations, and this contrast will lie at the heart of Socrates’ critique of Protagoras and of sophistry.

[18] Protagoras’ competitive or mercenary motivations are confirmed in the closing argument of the dialogue on pleasure and the power of knowledge. The sophist at first insists that pleasure is not simply good, that we must distinguish between good and bad pleasures (351c–e). Socrates then works through an imagined conversation with the Many, to whom the hedonistic standard is attributed, on the power of knowledge to control human action (353c–358a).¹⁹ He concludes this episode by scolding the Many: since (as the discussion has claimed) it is only ignorance that could cause one to act in ways that lead to less pleasure overall and that occasion regret over one’s choices, and since Protagoras and the other sophists claim to cure ignorance and to offer knowledge, then the Many’s mistrust of the sophists is irrational and counterproductive:

Thinking [the cause of bad decisions] to be something other than ignorance, you do not go to the sophists yourselves, nor do you send your children to them for instruction, believing

18. Schofield (1992, p. 129).

19. Socrates’ claim of motivational intellectualism, i.e. the denial that the phenomenon of synchronic *akrasia* is possible.

as you do that we are dealing with something unteachable.
 By worrying about your money and not giving it to them, you
 all do badly in both private and public life. (357e)

[19] Socrates immediately pivots from this scolding to ask Protagoras and the other sophists if they agree with what has been said (358ab). They think his argument is “extraordinarily true,” and jump to accept, straightforwardly, the premise on which it is built: “that the pleasant is good, the painful bad” and that “all actions leading toward living painlessly and pleasantly [are] honorable [...] good and beneficial.”

[20] The position that the sophists now affirm so eagerly is a sharp departure from Protagoras’ insistence, just prior, that it is only “taking pleasure in honorable things” that is good (351c). The relevant point for the argument here is not whether or not the hedonistic standard itself is a good one.²⁰ Rather, it is that Protagoras is induced to shift his position on this question by nothing more than an appeal to his pocketbook, a demonstration by Socrates that he can sell some more lessons if he endorses a valuation for which he had previously expressed disdain. As Friedländer puts it, “it takes a mere flattery to catch the Sophists off guard and push them back to the level of the many.”²¹

20. The question of hedonism is beside the point of this chapter, but I am inclined to agree with the many commentators who suggest (1) that the hedonistic premise serves simply as a means to an end in the context of the dialogue, (2) that one advantage it offers is that it allows Socrates to meet the Many on their own level and offer an argument that *even on their own terms* they must agree with him about the power of knowledge, and (3) that the whole episode is intended to test or to illustrate Protagoras’ relationship with popular opinion. See, e.g., Jaeger (1943, pp. 121–122, 124–125), Friedländer (1964, pp. 30–31), Gagarin (1969, pp. 155–156, 160), Beresford (2009, p. 209n37), Klosko (2006, p. 51), Rutherford (1995, p. 137–138).

21. Friedländer (1964, p. 31).

[21] Protagoras' competitive conception of argument is sustained to the end of the dialogue. As Socrates' argument comes to a close, Protagoras stops speaking and will only nod (360c), eventually refusing even to nod in his silence (360d). He bitterly accuses Socrates of "being eager to win" in forcing him to admit his final defeat (*φιλονικεῖν*, 360e), and when he collects himself his last words in the dialogue are a model speech of praise for the victor in a competition.²²

[22] Scholars are correct, then, to think that Protagoras' competitive approach to conversation and how this leads him to act is one significant target of Plato's criticism in the dialogue. Knowing that his wealth springs from his reputation, Protagoras is uncooperative in discussion and aims at winning rather than at truth,²³ proving ready to abandon the argument whenever it does not go his way.²⁴ And attentive to such professional concerns, he shows himself willing to shift his basic ethical commitments on the strength of nothing more than what will earn him money. The characterization of the sophist, then, is an object lesson from Plato in how not to do philosophy.

3.3.2 Socrates the Philosopher

[23] In contrast to the sophist and his unhelpful approach to philosophy, the *Protagoras* presents in the figure of Socrates a suggestion of how such

22. Carson (1992, p. 126) is excellent on Protagoras' closing speech.

23. Schofield (1992, esp. p. 123, 125–127), Rutherford (1995, esp. p. 132, 134), Friedländer (1964, e.g., p. 26, 29, 31), Trivigno (2013, p. 514).

24. This stands in contrast with Socrates' commitment to reaching the end of a conversation. Friedländer (1964, pp. 7–8), Schofield (1992, esp. pp. 125–127), Rutherford (1995), Burnyeat (2013).

questions ought to be approached.²⁵ The contrast drawn for the reader between Socrates and Protagoras springs from their fundamentally different orientation with regard to the conversation. While Protagoras is shown to approach discussion competitively, seeking to “win” and preserve the praise and reputation that sustain his career as a teacher, Socrates’ conversational ideal is that of a cooperative effort in search of truth or agreement: accused by Protagoras of “being eager to win” (*φιλονικεῖν*), Socrates insists that his only motivation is to get clear on the nature of virtue (360e–361a).²⁶

[24] This cooperative conversational ideal is fundamental to Socratic practice. Consider, for instance, his habitual disavowal of knowledge. Attending to the way in which Protagoras’ competitive outlook continually frustrates the discussion in the *Protagoras* and leads the interlocutors away from a search for truth and into quarreling, we see that Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge serves, among other purposes,²⁷ as an attempt to bow out of competition and so defuse such philosophy-obstructing dy-

25. This has not gone unrecognized. As Burnyeat (2013, p. 419) says, the dialogue offers “Plato’s most sustained treatment of the comparative merits of many different forms of *διαλέγεσθαι*.”

26. Cf. 348c–d, *Charmides* 166cd.

27. Another significant thought that supports Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is the desire to avoid “pandering to oneself” that is highlighted in the closing speech of the *Gorgias*.

namics insofar as he is able.²⁸

[25] In fact, many of Socrates' peculiar claims about how conversation ought to be conducted can be traced to this basic ideal of conversation as a cooperative search for truth or agreement.²⁹ So we have his insistence on short speeches (e.g. 336b, 329ab) and his mistrust of lengthy displays, which often implicitly claim moral authority, can enchant or confuse or be misunderstood by listeners, and do not accept interrogation to clarify what is being said (e.g., 329ab, 335bc, 336b).³⁰ So we have his insistence that conversations must reach completion in agreement

28. The desire to defuse competition also helps explain other Socratic conversational moves, such as the device of the imagined interlocutor that we see e.g. in the *Dialogue With The Many*. Schofield (1992, pp. 133–134) is entirely correct to call this an “ingenious device of coopting Protagoras to the same side ... [now] the dialogue can proceed uncompetitively, without the distracting intrusions of amour propre.”

29. In this context it may be worth noting that I reject one common claim about Socratic conversation, that Socrates insists on his interlocutors always saying what they really believe. While this comes up in the *Gorgias* a fair bit, Socrates is not usually very picky about whether his interlocutors endorse what is said or not, as long as the *logos* can be tested. See 333c, the *Dialogue With The Many*, most of the *Charmides*, the *Dialogue With The Laws* in the *Crito*, etc. It is true that Socrates' interlocutors are often tested as well, and it is true that sometimes this seems to be Socrates' aim. But “say only what you believe” is *not* a universal “ground rule” of Socratic conversation as e.g. Vlastos (1983b), Vlastos (1991, p. 113), Brickhouse and Smith (1994, pp. 12–14), Nehemas (1998, p. 116).

30. Friedländer is representative in calling short exchanges “a basic condition for philosophy in general” insofar as this form is necessary to preserve “the possibility of genuine exchange” (Friedländer, 1964, pp. 22–23). Cf. Adam and Adam (1893, p. xxvi), Jaeger (1943, p. 115), Gagarin (1969, p. 148), Schofield (1992, p. 129), Rutherford (1995, p. 133).

I would perhaps suggest that Socrates is less opposed to long speeches and myth-making that most take him to be. While it is true that such methods are *insufficient*, he does not deny that they have their place—perhaps especially after his encounter with Protagoras. See the *Gorgias* chapter; contrast Friedländer (1964, p. 14).

and that they must not be abandoned in the middle of things (e.g., 361c–e).³¹

[26] But here it is worth noting an odd feature of the literature on the *Protagoras*. Despite Socrates' insistence that he does not approach the conversation with competitive motives and that he is only trying to clear up some questions about the nature of virtue, it is very often suggested that he too falls into some blameworthy competitiveness in his contest with the sophist. Especially influential is Gregory Vlastos's complaint that Socrates is "not a wholly attractive figure in this dialogue" and that when the public discussion with Protagoras begins, "[Socrates] has climbed the public stage, or rather the ring he chooses to make of it, where all we shall soon see of him will be the prize fighter."³² In the words of another scholar, in this public discussion we find "a Socrates who is not altogether himself," who indulges in "gamesmanship" and "un-Socratic practices."³³

[27] The complaint that Socrates seems just as competitive as his

31. Schofield (1992) points out that Protagoras' willingness to abandon the argument is contrasted with the conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates on the way to Callias' house that the reader is not witness to: "When we got to the doorway we stood there discussing some point which had come up along the road and which we didn't want to leave unsettled before we went in. So we were standing there in the doorway discussing it until we reached agreement" (314c). Rutherford (1995) makes the same point.

32. Vlastos (1956, p. xxiv, xxvi respectively). p. 163] Gagarin (1969) approves of this description and speaks of "[Socrates'] own wish for an audience" (p. 140) and goes quite far in attributing competitiveness to Socrates (e.g. p. 148, 151). Schofield (1992, p. 130) also approves of Vlastos's complaint. Compare the language of combat that suffuses earlier treatments of the dialogue: Jaeger (1943, pp. 114–115, 117), Friedländer (1964, p. 7, 36).

33. Schofield (1992, p. 128).

opponent is an interesting one, but one that ultimately springs from a misreading of the drama of the dialogue. It is not in fact Socrates who “chooses to make” the public conversation into a competition; as demonstrated, this is decidedly Protagoras’ doing. The sophist continues to drag the conversation into competition despite Socrates’ efforts to redirect it toward more fruitful paths.³⁴ This misreading likely results from insufficient attention to Protagoras’ choice of a public display in a desire to show off.

[28] Socrates does not start the fight, we might say. But one particular complaint is that he seems unadmirably insistent on *finishing* it. “His handling of Protagoras is merciless, if not cruel,” Vlastos laments. While “the steel-trap quality of his arguing might be excused by the infinite importance he attaches to his method and its results ... when the job is done and the mortal stab has been delivered, is it necessary to make the victim himself give one more twist of the knife” by making the sophist admit the defeat that is already more than evident?³⁵

[29] While this characterization leads to some interesting interpretive possibilities,³⁶ I cannot accept it. While it is true that Socrates is

34. Rutherford (1995, p. 132) helpfully relates the sophist’s competitive approach to argument to the frustratingly wandering course of the dialogue—the formal confusion is caused and explained by Protagoras’ concern with winning.

35. Vlastos (1956, p. xxiv–xxv), citing 360e and declaring his sympathy for Protagoras (n. 4).

36. I am particularly intrigued by what I take to be the suggestion of Schofield (1992, p. 128) and Rutherford (1995, pp. 139–140). Schofield contrasts the Socrates we see with Hippocrates with “a Socrates who is not altogether himself” once the dialogue enters the house of Callias. Rutherford writes: “The dialogue cannot be an ideal model of dialectical argument on *arete*; it is contaminated by other motives and methods ... It is not surprising that

shown “in a fighting spirit” in his conversation with Protagoras,³⁷ it is not the case that his combativeness is *mere* competitiveness and so blameworthy. The thought that it is blameworthy rests on two mistakes that are intertwined. First (1), on a failure to recognize that there is much at stake in Socrates’ testing of Protagoras and his profession as a sophist, for all of the reasons that are worked out in the educational argument of the dialogue that the literature has not identified.³⁸ Second (2), on the idea that it is somehow illegitimate for Socrates to have a public- or audience-facing goal in conversation. So we find Malcolm Schofield speaking of “the disinterested ideal of cooperative enquiry that [‘the elenchus’] is officially meant to fulfill” and attempting to distinguish between an (acceptable) “adversarial” and (objectionable) “competitive” use of argument, and ascribing the latter to Socrates in the *Protagoras*:

It would probably be better to reserve ‘adversarial’ to describe the use of the elenchus against a stubborn and/or versatile interlocutor, with a strongly ingrained conceit of knowledge. Here the elenchus, always liable to be intimidating, may need to become aggressive—to attack an articulated or tenaciously held position, rather than just examine a sincere view. So long as the goal is the elimination of false belief, not victory, it will

the dialogue then ends inconclusively ... [The conversations at Callias’] in the end fall short of the dialectical ideals which Socrates offers and endeavours (imperfectly?) to exemplify in his own performance.” I take the suggestion to be that, finding himself on a public stage with a competitive interlocutor, Socrates cannot help but get caught up in the competition despite his own ideals. While suggestive and in fact quite compatible with or even helpful for my overall argument, I cannot avail myself of this thought because I do not accept the characterization of Socrates upon which it is based, for the reasons discussed in the main text.

37. Friedländer (1964, p. 7).

38. Discussed over the rest of the paper.

be adversarial without being competitive.³⁹

[30] The mistake here is to suppose that Socrates' efforts must aim *strictly* at caring for his interlocutor by eliminating false belief.⁴⁰ But this is too reductive.⁴¹ It is true that *one* goal of Socratic conversation is (1) to eliminate the interlocutor's false belief that she is wise. But this is not the only goal—or even, I would suggest, the primary goal. Socrates also aims (2) to test arguments on their own terms, whether or not they are the beliefs of his interlocutors. And one aim of testing persons is not simply to aid them on a personal level, but (3) to publicly test public persons so as to *reveal* their ignorance, not only to themselves but also to others. The point of Socrates' efforts in the *Protagoras* is not simply to make some progress on questions about virtue or to reveal to Protagoras himself that he may not be as wise as he would like to think, but also to reveal to *Hippocrates* and the others present⁴² that Protagoras is not as wise as he would claim and that there is something personally and politically dangerous about the sophist's profession. But if this is true, then it is legitimate for Socrates to have audience-facing concerns in test-

39. Schofield (1992, p. 131, previous quotation p. 130). Recall the rejection, previously, of what is implied by Schofield's "rather than just examine a sincere view."

40. So Schofield (1992, p. 129): "Presumably [Socrates'] real interest in brief answers ought to be that only so can an elenchus be conducted, and only by means of the elenchus can false pretensions to knowledge be stripped away, and only in this way can the soul be properly cared for."

41. I generally reject myopic or reductive talk of *the* Socratic method that attempts to isolate a single goal or practice. Socrates' goals and method are at least moderately complex.

42. And to the companion to whom Socrates is recounting the conversation, and (of course) to the reader.

ing the traveling teacher, and so his combativeness must be understood as motivated not by a competitive desire to win glory for himself—he is careful to present a humble picture of himself in his final speeches of the dialogue—but rather by a desire to reveal the sophist and his profession to the audience.

[31] In fact, this suggests the general shortcoming of the *Protagoras* literature, that it takes the contrast between Socrates and the sophist to be drawn, we might say, purely at the personal or individual level. Protagoras has some bad assumptions about educational and philosophical theory and a competitive approach to argument, and this produces some bad philosophical methods or habits (e.g., long speeches, the interpretation of poetry). Plato aims to correct these defects by suggesting the importance of knowledge, the irrelevance of poetic interpretation, and the necessity of short dialectical exchanges. And all of this is undeniably one effort of the dialogue. But as will be shown in the rest of the chapter, this flattens out the other side of the dialogue’s argument—that the sophist and his profession are *politically* dangerous. There is a *public* side to Plato and Socrates’ argument in addition to the private side.⁴³

43. The purely personal focus of the literature is almost universal. Adam and Adam (1893), Jaeger (1943), Vlastos (1956, e.g. p. xxiv, xxvi), Friedländer (1964, e.g. pp. 22–23, 26, 29, 31), Schofield (1992, as shown), Rutherford (1995). Consider, e.g., the flattened view of Hippocrates’ role in the dialogue expressed by Schofield (1992, p. 127): Hippocrates drops out of view because “the young man has served his turn, which was to be the partner in a proper Socratic conversation.” It is true that this is *one* of Hippocrates’ roles in the dialogue. But his other role is as a representative of the ambitious young men whose education is directed by his eager imitation of whatever is publicly praised.

3.4 Simonides the Sophist

[32] To construct the public side of Socrates' argument in the *Protagoras*, we must examine the vexatious Simonides episode. Attending to Socrates' dismissive comments at the end of the episode (347c–348a), most scholars understand the episode as “a pointless digression” from the dialogue's main argument⁴⁴ that aims only to present “a parody of poetic criticism in order to show the absurdity of all such exercises” as an attack on sophistic philosophical and educational method.⁴⁵

[33] As I will show, however, there is much more to the Simonides episode than simply an attack on the interpretation of poetry.⁴⁶ The episode is central to the dialogue's political argument. For in Socrates' account of Simonides and his poem, we see Socrates' political argument about the danger of sophistry, a danger that threatens to corrupt the education of any free society. And in Socrates' light-hearted sketch of a philosophical Sparta, he hints at his proposed solution to this political problem: the rejection of free society and the control of poetry by an

44. Rutherford (1995, p. 132).

45. Gagarin (1969, p. 151). This reading is near universal. See e.g. Adam and Adam (1893, pp. xxvi–xxviii), Jaeger (1943, p. 118), Friedländer (1964, p. 23–24), Taylor (1991, p. xiii), Rutherford (1995, pp. 132–135).

While it is true that Socrates does not think that the interpretation of poetry is the best way to proceed, as Trivigno (2013) points out, it may nevertheless be a useful or necessary exercise in a cultural context in which poetry holds a preeminent place.

46. Beresford (2009), with Beresford (2008), is almost the only reading of the *Protagoras* that sees anything more in the episode. He argues (1) that the episode is *not* working on a claim about poetry or sophistry, but rather (2) that it offers an attack on *this particular poem* and the ideas that it expresses. While Beresford's account of (2) the latter is persuasive, he errs in dismissing (1) the former, as will be shown.

authoritarian philosophical council.

3.4.1 First Sophists

[34] To begin, consider Protagoras' role in the dialogue. In his first speech (316c–317c), he offers a history of sophistry that “aligns the sophists, and especially Protagoras himself, with the poets” and “sets his profession in a distinguished tradition.”⁴⁷ And Protagoras himself is not just any sophist, but the *first* sophist, “the first ever to have deemed it appropriate to charge a fee” for his teaching (349a). Thus, the role Protagoras plays in the dialogue is not just that of some interchangeable interlocutor or even one limited to the historical Protagoras' particular theories. Rather, he functions as the “First Sophist,” standing as a representative of the profession as a whole,⁴⁸ in quite the same way that Hippocrates represents the complementary type: the ambitious young man whose education is directed by his eager imitation of whatever is publicly praised.

[35] Simonides, too, is not just any poet or just any character. In fact, he functions in the dialogue as a figure parallel to Protagoras, another

47. Rutherford (1995, pp. 126–127).

48. Adam and Adam (1893, pp. xvii–xviii) are right that Protagoras is attacked as a *representative* figure (though they mean it in a different sense). We can answer the tentative question offered by Rutherford (1995, p. 139n43)—whether Diogenes Laërtius' alternate title for the dialogue, “The Sophists” is apt—with a strong affirmation.

Incidentally, this counts against Gagarin (1969, p. 162)'s suggestion that Prodicus and Hippias are mostly sidelined in the dialogue because Plato does not consider them interlocutors worthy of serious engagement. Whatever we think about *that*, the primary explanation for the focus on Protagoras is that he represents sophistry as a whole. So it is that Socrates brings in Hippias and Prodicus for his appeal to the pocketbook: “this is your conversation also,” he says (358a). The point, developed below, is that the sophists are for sale.

“First Sophist” who represents sophistry as such and the political problem that it presents.⁴⁹ For Simonides not only (1) pioneered the genre of the *epinikion*, the praise poem on occasion of victory, but also (2) was the first poet to compose his poems in return for a fee. And “as such he provides a worthy analogue to Protagoras the sophist, who ... invented the trade of the professional educator.”⁵⁰ Simonides and Protagoras, then, are parallel figures, and as the dialogue works out its argument, they represent the same basic problem with free society.

[36] Recall the theory of education as socialization presented in Protagoras’ Great Speech and enacted by Hippocrates. The youth in the city are encouraged to “eagerly imitate” and to “long to become like” whomever is praised by the citizen body or in the “works of the good poets.” These models are presented to them as paradigms on which they should shape their lives. So it is that Hippocrates wishes to study with Protagoras despite knowing nothing about the teacher except that “everyone praises the man.” Under this theory of socialization, a praise-poet like Simonides functions as a moral operative, shaping public perceptions of what is good and what is bad and so the education of the city. Accordingly, if Plato has some reason to think that the poet is liable to *misallocate* his praise and blame, then he will have a serious cause to worry about the effect this would have on public virtue.

[37] And Plato does worry about the influence of Simonides on precisely such grounds: that his praise is allocated not out of a genuine be-

49. It is no accident that Protagoras’ genealogy of sophistry names Simonides after Homer and Hesiod as poetic practitioners of sophistic education (316d).

50. Carson (1992, p. 113).

lief (much less out of genuine knowledge) as to what is praiseworthy and what is blameworthy, but out of nothing more than competitive and mercenary motive. As Anne Carson has it, the poet's social role of drawing the distinction between what is praiseworthy and what is blameworthy "carries with it an active responsibility,"⁵¹ and a major implication of the *Protagoras* is that the poet's "motives for praise cannot be trusted" because his practice amounts to "counting out wisdom for coins."⁵² Thus, if it is true that Plato attacks Simonides because "he is annoyed by [the poem's] influence,"⁵³ his annoyance is not just that Simonides is *wrong* but (1) that he praises the wrong *role model* and (2) that this is no accident, that his profession of selling praise for money is as a rule untrustworthy and tends to corrupt the city's culture.

51. Carson (1992). This is mixed up, in Carson's discussion of the ideology of praise-poetry, with an ontological claim attributed to praise-poetry that seems tantalizingly close to Protagoras' "man is the measure"—that human goodness is *created* by the poet's praise and the beliefs it instills in the community. But more to the point, while Carson states that the praise-poet "is obligated to announce this difference [viz., between praiseworthy and blameworthy] in public poetry[—t]he justice and health of the community depend on it" (*ibid.*), it is not clear from her treatment just how this works, and whether it is a claim that she would attribute to Plato and Socrates in addition to the praise-poets.

52. Carson (1992, p. 122, 114 respectively).

53. Beresford (2009, pp. 193–194): "Plato's interest in the song ... [comes] from the fact that he is annoyed by its influence. That would put his treatment of it into line with his critique of Homer and the tragedians in the *Republic* and his entire approach, there, to literary criticism, which he connects very closely with censorship and moral education." Cf. Kahn (1998, p. 105) on the *Ion*: "It is as a moral and intellectual influence rather than as an art form that poetry becomes an object for Plato's criticism, both here and elsewhere."

3.4.2 Simonides for Sale

[38] What is especially important to Plato's argument is the characterization Socrates offers of Simonides' (alleged) motive in composing his poem, along with certain facts about the ancient tradition that are not immediately evident to the modern reader. Although part of Socrates' effort is to "erase" certain offending ideas from the poem and read into it his own favorite theses,⁵⁴ the other part of his effort is to suggest an argument against free society by a characterization of the poet as an unscrupulous praise-monger who has unthinkingly—in pursuit of wealth and reputation—introduced a morally corrupting maxim into the cultural canon.

[39] As Socrates tells it, Simonides composes his poem on an attack of an old saying of Pittacus'. In ancient times, Socrates says, this saying was well-regarded and "passed around in private and praised (*ἐγκωμιαζόμενον*) by the wise" (343b).⁵⁵ Seeing this,

Simonides, ambitious for philosophical fame, saw that if he could score a takedown against this saying, as if it were a famous wrestler, and get the better of it, he would himself become famous in his own lifetime. So he composed this poem as a deliberate attack against this maxim. (343c)

[40] To achieve his end, a reputation for wisdom, Simonides sets out to show that Pittacus' saying is false. I am not a blame-loving man, the poet says (346c), "but now, since you're thought to be speaking truly when in fact you're blatantly lying about the greatest matters, for this I

54. This is one of the main points of Beresford (2009).

55. Translation mine, to bring out the theme of praise. (Contrast Lombardo and Bell's bland "circulated with approval among the sages.")

blame you” (347a).⁵⁶ So what is it that Pittacus has said so falsely? Here the traditional background is important:

The story is (Schol. to Plato *Hipp Maior* 304 E quoted by Sauppe) that Pittacus, when ruler of Mitylene, on hearing of Periander’s rapid conversion into a tyrant, sat down at an altar and begged to be released of his rule, assigning as his reason ὥς χαλεπὸν ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι [“Being good is hard”].⁵⁷

[41] This certainly seems like a sound little moral anecdote, and it is on the strength of such wisdom that Pittacus is accorded a place among the Seven Sages.⁵⁸ And here the problem comes into view. Simonides aims to upset this piece of wisdom, loved by the ancient sages, and in its place install a new piece of praise: “So long as he does nothing shameful willfully, I give my praise and love to any man. Not even the gods can fight necessity” (345d3–6). In place of Pittacus’ healthy caution with regard to the temptation to abuse power, Simonides is ready to excuse those who act badly. Alarm bells sound for Plato’s readers!

[42] This is especially concerning, in Socrates’ view, when we consider just what is implied by Simonides’ language of “some unmanageable crisis” (ἀμύχανος συμφορά). As Beresford shows in his discussion of the episode,⁵⁹ this language is understood to include reference not

56. Of course, in considering Socrates’ use of Simonides as a character, the reader should contrast (A) the pious concern for public morals that “Simonides” proclaims as his motivation with (B) the merely competitive and glory-seeking aim that Socrates suggests is the poet’s *true* motive.

57. Adam and Adam (1893, 339c). I accept Beresford (2008)’s reconstruction of the poem and use his translations where appropriate.

58. List given at 343a; Pittacus is also mentioned as a Sage in *Republic* I.

59. Beresford (2009, pp. 198–200).

simply to a difficult situation but also to such emotions as greed, lust, and anger. But these are the sort of desires that, paradigmatically, are understood to lead to *πλεονεξία* and unjust action, precisely the sort of motivations that lead the bearer of the Ring of Gyges to wickedness in the challenge of *Republic II* (*Rep. II*, 359c–360d).⁶⁰ From Socrates and Plato’s perspective, then, Simonides is attempting to unseat the appropriate moral caution of Pittacus and put in its place a perfectly horrible sort of excuse-making in face of desire, a shrugging endorsement of injustice.⁶¹

[43] The attack on Simonides’ motive in writing the poem continues with Socrates’ misuse of the word “willingly” in order to discover his favorite denial of *akrasia*. Simonides must have meant the “willingly” with regard to his own act of praise, says Socrates, for he “was not so uneducated as to say” something that “none of the wise men believe”—that anybody ever does wrong willingly. Rather, all who do wrong do so unwillingly (345d6–e4). And Simonides would be especially aware of this, for “he believed that a noble and good man often forces himself to love and praise someone” (346a). Some examples cloud the waters, but the claim that Socrates gives to Simonides is that the poet *willingly* praises those who do nothing wrong, but faced with “necessity” (which not even the gods resist), he *unwillingly* praises wrongdoers. Socrates adds: “I think that Simonides believed that often he himself had praised and given encomiums to (ἐπαινέσαι καὶ ἐγωμιάσαι) some tyrant or other such person,

60. See Cooper (2004) for discussion.

61. This is essentially to recommend the pandering orientation of service to one’s own appetites that is the target of Socrates’ attack in the *Gorgias*—for which see that chapter.

not willingly but under necessity” (346b–c).

[44] This is why Simonides of all people would not say that some people do wrong willingly: because he believed that he too did wrong—in praising tyrants and the like—, but claimed that he did so only *unwillingly*, “under necessity.” But further attention to traditional background sharpens Plato’s point. For the “necessity” under which Simonides “often” supposed himself to be acting when he praised tyrants is nothing more than the desire for money. The poet had a reputation for avarice,⁶² which was “the subject of frequent anecdotes”; e.g.,

Someone asked Simonides to write an encomium, and said he would be grateful. Since he was not offering any money, Simonides said “I keep two chests, one for gratitude and one for money. Whenever I open the one for gratitude, I find it empty of anything that might meet my needs; it is only the other one I find useful”.⁶³

[45] Simonides is hardly cast in a flattering light, then. But when we step back and consider the implications of this characterization in light of the theory of socialization announced in the Great Speech and enacted by the character of Hippocrates, we see that Socrates’ characterization of Simonides is used to highlight a social and political problem. For Simonides, the professional praise-poet and First Sophist, is shown

62. Adam and Adam (1893, 346b) identify this as “a sly thrust at Simonides’ notorious avarice,” citing Pindar Isthm. II 6 and Aristotle EN I.3, 1096a5.

63. Denyer (2008, *ad loc.*), quoting Stobaeus 3.10.38. The parallel between Protagoras and Simonides continues. As Carson (1992, 113–114) points out, “both Protagoras and Simonides won for their pains a solid reputation of avarice, penury, and greed.” See also Bell (1978).

In view of this reputation, then, Carson (1992, p. 122) missteps in seeming to identify the “necessity” under which Simonides operates as the threat of force from his tyrannical patrons. Rather, the “necessity” is Simonides’ “need” for ever more wealth.

to praise not on the basis of what is truly praiseworthy, but on the basis of (1) concern for his own reputation and (2) his desire for money. Simonides is nothing more than a praise-monger, willing to praise anything for a price. And in fact, the poem itself reveals the poet carelessly attacking a morally salutary maxim and seeking to replace it with an ethical claim that Plato and Socrates find abhorrent. But this represents a social problem. For it is precisely this sort of praise and blame, admonitions and encomiums, that shape the aspirations of the youth (as demonstrated with the character of Hippocrates) and so the moral character of the citizenry and the politics of a free society.

3.4.3 Some Consequences

[46] This reading revises our understanding of the Simonides episode in several important respects. First of all (1), it shows that the episode is much more than a “pointless digression” or simply an attack on the value of poetic interpretation as such.⁶⁴ Rather, this central episode in the dialogue illustrates the Socratic argument that sophistry—the competitive display of wisdom or praise in pursuit of reputation or wealth—poses a threat to society.

[47] Second (2), although Beresford’s demonstration that the episode contains an attack on the specific ethical claims made in Simonides’ poem is quite persuasive, we must reject his other suggestion that *all* that is at issue in this episode (and, he seems to think, in the dialogue as a whole) is an attack on specific ethical claims. He dismisses the thought that the dialogue presents any “wider critique of sophistic education—as

64. See notes above.

if sophists in general, and their varied interests, are the subject of the dialogue ... Plato does not take on Protagoras and his ideas because he is a sophist. Rather, he opposes the sophist *because of his ideas* ... The bulk of the dialogue is not a critique of ‘sophistic’ methods (there is no such thing) but of those ideas in particular.”⁶⁵ He appends a note: “[Plato objects] to intellectuals who earn wages ... out of aristocratic social prejudice. Only [this] completely trivial characteristic unites all ‘sophists’. Protagoras is a (wage-earning) *philosopher*, by any fair sense of the term, and a very good one.”⁶⁶

[48] While Beresford’s argument that the specific ethical claims in the poem draw Plato’s ire seems quite correct, he errs in supposing this to be the whole story. In this beautifully constructed dialogue Plato is operating at both levels: he is attacking certain specific ideas *and* attacking sophistry as such, by describing a process of *how* such terrible ideas come to be widely accepted in a free society. So Beresford is quite right that wage-earning is the only characteristic that unites sophists, but by failing to attend to Socrates’ story of Simonides’ motivations in composing the poem and how this fits with the theory of socialization in play in the dialogue, he goes quite wrong in thinking that the critique of wage-earning is “trivial” or *merely* “aristocratic prejudice” on Plato’s

65. Beresford (2009, p. 187).

66. Beresford (2009, p. 187n6). Elsewhere (Beresford, 2009, p. 205), on the mocking tone of the Simonides episode: “this Aristophanic mauling is not directed at sophists in general, or at poets in general, and least of all at Protagoras, who is a virtually silent spectator” but rather at the specific ideas in the poem.

part.⁶⁷ Rather, the fact that the sophist is for sale is the core of the problem that the *Protagoras* builds into an indictment of free society.⁶⁸

[49] The third point here is (3) that this reading should thoroughly dispel the common suggestion that Simonides is cast as a “Socratic” figure to some significant degree in the dialogue. Rutherford understands it that “Simonides has been playing a Socratic role, conducting an interrogation of Pittacus.”⁶⁹ Trivigno supposes that Socrates has “turn[ed] Simonides into a kind of Socratic philosopher, one who refutes the claims of others”; “Simonides is a philosopher who engages in refutation.”⁷⁰ Beresford suggests that “Simonides’ (imaginary) attack on Pittacus ... shadows Plato’s own attack on Simonides. Socrates tells us that A is annoyed by the fact that B’s ideas are ‘widely circulated and highly regarded’ (343b5) and so A, who ‘takes pride in his philosophical abilities’ (343c1) aims to ‘knock down B’s idea, like someone knocking down a champion

67. Gagarin (1969, pp. 137–138) also seriously errs in his assessment of the sale of wisdom, taking it to be a neutral fact that Plato has no real objection to.

68. One hint that Beresford’s account falls short is that his telling of the “unity” of the *Protagoras* omits any mention of the framing conversations: “the song not only fits in, it actually helps us to see the philosophical unity of the dialogue, because it nicely explains the connection between the opening debate about democracy, and the closing discussion about *acrasia*” (Beresford, 2009, p. 214). But once we attend to the role of Hippocrates in the dialogue, and so the purpose of the framing devices, the critique of sophistry as such comes to the fore and it becomes obvious that this presents a *political* argument.

69. Rutherford (1995, p. 136).

70. Trivigno (2013, pp. 521–522, 526, respectively). It is odd that Trivigno does not notice the crucial distinction here, for he recognizes elsewhere that under attack is the fact that “a sophistic interpreter approaches a poem as the words of a potential ally or rival in the pursuit of reputation and standing in the community” (Trivigno, 2013, p. 534).

wrestler’.”⁷¹

[50] But this sort of suggestion will not do, for it elides the crucial difference between Socrates and Simonides in their motivation and attitude toward the truth. Beresford makes this mistake quite directly when he renders the telling *φιλότιμος ὧν ἐπὶ σοφία* (“ambitious for philosophical fame” or “avid for honor in point of wisdom”) as “tak[ing] pride in his philosophical abilities” and attributes this to Simonides and to Plato without distinction. But, as has been shown, this is the crucial distinction on the basis of which Plato attacks Simonides.

3.5 Constructing Kallipolis

[51] Armed with this interpretive work on the theory of socialization and the critique of sophistry that are in play in the *Protagoras*, we are finally in a position to construct the *political* argument of the text. As it turns out, the dialogue offers a strong indictment of free society and suggests, in Socrates’ parody of a philosophical Sparta, that the problem identified could be solved by by a political regime that rejects cultural and political freedom or (put another way) maintains strict control of poetry, a suggestion that looks forward to the *Republic*. In the Socratic dialogues, we might say, we find Plato at work constructing Kallipolis.

3.5.1 Against Crowd Politics

[52] Much of the methodological critique of Protagoras can be understood as a criticism of the large-scale crowd politics that characterized Greek

71. Beresford (2009, pp. 216–217n42).

democracy. For example, this seems to be the implication of Socrates' repeated insistence on a procedure of brief dialectical exchanges rather than one of swapping long display speeches and of his related complaint that orators and poets cannot be questioned.

[53] But there is more to the problem of crowd politics than the fact of long speeches just in itself. For prominent in the *Protagoras* is a worry about the *audience* and the suggestion that the presence and participation of the crowd will hamper or distort moral-political deliberation. While it is true that Protagoras and Simonides play to the audience rather than concerning themselves with the truth of what they are saying, the problem the dialogue diagnoses is not merely that the sophists themselves are acting badly; the problem could not be solved if only Protagoras and Simonides were better-motivated when they turn to discuss ethical matters. For throughout the dialogue we see that the audience, too, contributes to the corruption of education. Consider, for example, that the audience only ever applauds the sort of point-scoring disputatiousness that is the target of Socratic criticism.⁷² Rutherford is quite correct, then, to describe the public conversation with Protagoras as "set against a background of spectators who want a good show rather than a philosophically correct solution."⁷³ And this is shown to shape the conversation that plays out. Insofar as being in the eyes of an audience influences the speakers and the course of the conversation, the influence is not a healthy one.

[54] And not only does the arrangement of crowd politics encourage

72. At 334c and 339e.

73. Rutherford (1995, p. 140).

speakers to adapt themselves to the audience and make their proposals in the form of long display-speeches that are inimical to philosophical progress for a number of reasons, but the crowd's interventions also tend to interfere with the speakers' judgment in a more direct fashion, on top of the effect of encouraging badly-motivated speech. Notice Socrates' description of the crowd's uproar and its effect on him when Protagoras lands his first point about the Simonides poem.

When Protagoras said this, most of the listeners erupted in applause and praise (θόρυβον παρέσχευ καὶ ἔπαινον). At first I felt as if I had been hit by a good boxer. Everything went black and I was reeling from Protagoras' oratory and the others' uproar (τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιθορυβησάντων). Then, to tell you the truth, to stall for time ... (339de)

Given Plato's habitual metaphors of light and vision for judgment, the meaning here is plainly that Socrates finds it difficult to think clearly in the distracting uproar of the crowd.⁷⁴

[55] In these ways, then, the *Protagoras* shows a sincere distaste for the sort of large-scale crowd politics that characterized Greek democracy. And considering the problematic dynamics of crowd politics, Plato draws an emphatic contrast for his reader between such public settings that interfere with good moral-political deliberation and private settings more conducive to healthy conversation. This is the effect of arranging the Hippocrates conversation and the first (private) conversation with Protagoras as frames for the reader to stand in contrast with what transpires after the interlocutors have "climbed the public stage."⁷⁵ The same con-

74. Compare the *Gorgias* chapter.

75. Quotation Vlastos (1956, p. xxvi). The contrast between private and pub-

trast is drawn between the private meetings of the Spartan sophists or the councils of the Sages in which Pittacus' salutary maxim was "passed around in private and praised" and the public disruption of Simonides' effort. The suggestion is that it is at least difficult, and perhaps impossible, to sustain a healthy discussion of the most important things in a public setting; a private setting is a better (a necessary?) context for philosophical progress.⁷⁶

3.5.2 Against Free Society

[56] Now, in considering these problems with crowd politics that the *Protagoras* brings out, the reader may wonder about the possibility of certain institutional fixes that could mitigate these concerns to some extent while maintaining cultural freedom and keeping political power in the hands of the *dêmos*. Small scale philosophical councils drawn from the citizenry by lot and at regular intervals, perhaps? But whatever we

lic settings, and Protagoras' desire to show off, explain what so puzzles Friedländer about the difference between the conversations. He writes: "in the first polite exchange, Protagoras used the word 'conversation' (*διαλεχθῆναι*, 316B 3), and Socrates in replying left it open how this 'conversation' (*διαλέγεσθαι*, 317C 3) was to be conducted—as if the manner of speaking were self-understood. The reader must be startled, therefore, when Protagoras launches into a long speech, the opposite of conversing, and at the end even suggests 'going on' (317c 5)" (Friedländer, 1964, p. 10). A reader who notices the theme of publicity and competition, however, will not be so surprised (at least on a second read of the text).

76. The contrast between private and public settings receives good emphasis from Schofield (1992) and Rutherford (1995). But as with most of the literature on the *Protagoras* and its description of the dialogue as an ethical and methodological critique of Protagoras himself, these treatments take no notice of the *political* aspect of the argument.

might make of such speculation,⁷⁷ it is not a line of thought that is compatible with the political vision that the *Protagoras* is advancing. For the argument of the dialogue, while it does highlight certain difficulties with particular institutions of Greek democracy, is most fundamentally an attack on *free society* as such. *Any* arrangement that allows for political and cultural freedom, Socrates thinks, will suffer from the problems described. The city would be better off unfree and ruled by a permanent philosophical council.

[57] To see that the argument of the *Protagoras* is an argument against free society as such, we can reframe the problem that Socrates is presenting. For another way to describe the applause that the audience awards is to say that the crowd is the actor that *judges* in the dynamic process of competition and praise that is under consideration in the dialogue. But the crowd, Plato believes, is necessarily an ignorant and incompetent judge when it comes to moral questions.⁷⁸ So while Socrates'

77. As will be shown, Plato would take his argument to hold even against such an arrangement. But for what it is worth, I see no real evidence that Plato (or any Greek thinker) ever considers such a thought. And I am not even certain that such a proposal would be considered "democratic" in the Greek view. And my goal here is to discover Plato's own political argument, what he takes himself to be proposing about politics. I am not asking what we might make of his argument. And so we can set such speculation aside and focus on the political proposals that are in evidence.

78. It is worth pointing out that the claim that the crowd is ignorant, familiar from the *Gorgias* (*Gorg.* 459a), in no way requires a strong claim of differentiation in natural ability such as we find in the *Republic*. All that Socrates needs to get the thought that the crowd will always be ignorant is the claim that achieving expert ethical knowledge is *quite difficult*. That being so, then even if every member of the crowd were to diligently pursue philosophy, the fact would remain that even in the best instance only a few would ever be expert. The principle of specialization, we might say, offers just as much of an argument for the rule of a specially-trained few as would any claim about differing natural ability (these two principles are

initial challenge to Protagoras about the wisdom of Athenian political practice focuses on the wisdom of letting just anyone *speak* in moral-political deliberations, once we attend to the role differentiation in the Athenian assembly between the speaker who ventures to advise the *dēmos* and the audience who listens and judges we can helpfully reframe the question: Is the crowd competent to *judge* competing proposals when it comes to moral-political questions, “the most important matters”?

[58] Plato denies that the crowd could serve as a competent judge in ethical matters. For it will always be the case that most people are ethically ignorant, he thinks, and ethical non-experts are unable to reliably identify ethical experts and distinguish them from mere pretenders.⁷⁹ But as the *Protagoras* illustrates, this is the essential dynamic and fundamental arrangement of any free society: the crowd—whether assembled *as* a crowd or dispersed—is the actor that awards praise and blame. Accordingly, the education of a free society is always open to disruption by bad moral operatives.⁸⁰ And free society will also *create* such harmful

distinguished for the reader in the foundation of the Simple City at *Rep.* II, 370a–c).

Now, it is true that Protagoras employs a claim of differing natural ability in his Great Speech, in the attempt to answer the puzzle of Pericles’ sons (326e–327c). But it is not clear to me either (1) just how strong of a claim about natural ability Protagoras himself intends (or would endorse in a less rhetorically fraught context) or (2) whether Socrates or Plato endorse such a thought to any real degree in the Socratic dialogues. While I cannot rule out the possibility, if there is good evidence in the Socratic dialogues for a claim of strong difference in persons’ natural capacities, I am not aware of it.

79. See the *Charmides* chapter.

80. Two comments here are quite important. First (1), some scholars have suggested that in the dialogue Protagoras is portrayed as having a *positive* social and moral influence. See Corey (2015) and Vlastos (1956). Consider

figures: as there are great rewards (honor, wealth, etc.) for those who are praised and thought wise, what arises is a perverse incentive for clever speakers to engineer moral disruption, arguing for just any position regardless of ethical value in the effort to win praise from the ignorant crowd that sits in judgment on such “contests in words” (*ἀγῶνα*

Theaetetus 167 and the way in which Protagoras’ Great Speech functions as a morally salutary update of Hesiod’s myth. If it is the case that “the Many perceive practically nothing, but merely repeat as a hymn (*ὑμνοῦσιν*) whatever their leaders announce” (317a), then perhaps free society could be saved if only it had a better group of wise speakers, who would manipulate the cultural canon to ensure that it contained ethically and socially useful models for the youth to imitate.

This is a rich suggestion. And surely Plato would think that one of the tasks of the philosopher in a corrupt society *is* to engage in such policing of public morals as far as she is able, perhaps on the model of Socrates (though Plato’s position here may well change; if one of the major lessons of the *Gorgias* is that the attempt to reform a corrupt society through Socratic means is bound to fail, or at least is very unlikely to succeed, then we may see Plato give up offering such advice).

But this suggestion will not rescue free society as an acceptable political possibility in Plato’s view. For even in a free society gifted with a public-spirited class of philosophical gadflies, the perverse incentives that generate the problem remain. Protagoras may be shown to make a helpful contribution to public morality in his Great Speech, but it is also true that at the end of the dialogue he is revealed to be for sale. And Pittacus is esteemed for his wisdom, but this honored position only creates a target for Simonides. The structure of a free society tends to generate morally disruptive speakers.

The second comment (2) adds on to this dynamic: consider the impact of the *Gorgias* argument discussed in that chapter. With the claim of the vicious circle and the idea that the judgment of the vicious comes to be severely distorted, we get a moral-psychological picture that locks down or reinforces the corruption of free society. For once Pittacus is displaced and citizens begin to fashion themselves in imitation of the imperfect man whom Simonides praises, it becomes more and more difficult to reform them. Simonides can disrupt Pittacus, but it is much more difficult for Socrates to disrupt Simonides in turn. The vicious circle locks in the corruption that Simonides initiates. This ruins the hope that a free society, once it becomes corrupted, would be able to talk its way out of vice, and so further serves to disbar a free society as an acceptable political ideal.

λόγων).⁸¹

3.5.3 A Philosophical Sparta

[59] That Socrates' target in the *Protagoras* is free society as such and that his counter-proposal is an unfree society ruled by a council of philosophers is demonstrated in the parodic sketch of Sparta as a preeminently philosophical society that he draws for his audience as a preface to his treatment of Simonides' poem (342a–343c). A summary is in order.

[60] Unknown to most people, Socrates says, Sparta is the most philosophical city in Greece.⁸² But the Spartans keep this fact a secret, fearing that if the *real* cause of their hegemony were known, others would begin to train themselves in Spartan philosophy (ἀσκήσειν τὴν σοφίαν) instead of merely imitating (μιμούμενοι) Spartan habits of dress and athletic training. And in their secret philosophizing, “when the Spartans want to consult freely with their sophists and are annoyed with consulting them secretly⁸³ they pass alien exclusion acts ... and consult their sophists concealed from foreigners.” And “so that their youth won't unlearn what they are taught, they do not permit any of them to travel

81. This fits neatly with certain anti-democratic themes found elsewhere in the Socratic dialogues. As the *Gorgias* shows, it is not the orator who controls the crowd but the crowd that controls the orator (e.g., *Gorg.* 481c–482c, 510a–511a, 513a–c). It is worth comparing the attack on allowing the crowd to judge musical competitions in the *Laws* (e.g., *Laws* II, 656a–659c; cf. *Laws* III, 700a–701c). Even in his last work, Plato is making the same arguments about poetry and the danger of free society that we find here in the *Protagoras*.

82. I omit Crete, which is as usual treated as mirroring Sparta.

83. βούλωνται ἀνέδην τοῖς παρ' αὐτοῖς συγγενέσθαι σοφισταῖς καὶ ἤδη ἄχθονται λάθρα συγγιγνόμενοι.

to other cities.”

[61] Socrates continues. Characteristic of Spartan philosophy is Laconic brevity in conversation, and Spartan women as well as men take pride in their philosophical education.⁸⁴ But although the Spartans’ wisdom now goes unnoticed, the ancient Sages knew of it, and they all “emulated, loved, and studied Spartan education.”⁸⁵ That imitation is shown in their practice of Laconic brevity, evident in the sayings that they inscribed at Delphi as the best of their wisdom, those sayings that “everyone now repeats like a hymn” (ὑμνοῦσιν): “Know thyself” and “Nothing in excess.”⁸⁶ All of this provides the context for Socrates’ story of how Pittacus’ saying, well-regarded and “passed around in private and praised by the wise,” was disrupted by a Simonides “ambitious for philosophical fame” (343bc).

[62] This is the crux of Socrates’ political argument. To begin, it demonstrates why the previous concerns about unscrupulous speakers corrupting education weigh against *any* free society rather than just particular free societies that have insufficient respect for philosophy. For consider Simonides’ action. The context that Socrates appears to describe in his depiction of ancient times is a setting that features small councils

84. While the inclusion of women is not directly relevant to my argument, it is another way in which Socrates and Plato are looking ahead to Kallipolis.

85. ζῆλωται καὶ ἐρασταὶ καὶ μαθηταὶ ἦσαν τῆς Λακεδαιμονίων παιδείας.

86. For ὑμνοῦσιν compare Protagoras’ statement at 317a that “the Many perceive practically nothing, but merely repeat as a hymn (ὑμνοῦσιν) whatever their leaders announce.” I prefer the rather excessive “repeat as a hymn” to maintain the connection with poetry and to better capturing the semi-religious and rather catechetical cast, in Plato’s telling, of such culturally-celebrated moral maxims or touchstones.

of the wise that meet in private and which promulgate their wisdom to society at large to some good effect (as with the Delphic sayings). But nevertheless, despite whatever wisdom their councils had to offer the Sages' approval of Pittacus' saying proved grossly ineffective in face of Simonides' public attack on the maxim.

[63] The implication is clear. No matter how well private and small-scale philosophizing may go in context of free society at large, it cannot be counted on to maintain moral authority or public allegiance so long as the conclusions of the wise are open to challenge by just anyone—in other words, so long as the society is in fact a free one. For so long as that is the case, the incentive exists for unscrupulous clever speakers to tilt at the morally salutary wisdom that is praised, and the judge that presides over such contests will be the ignorant crowd, an actor that cannot be relied upon to judge well.⁸⁷ Sooner or later, Simonides will come along and dethrone Pittacus, taking down whatever is rightly praised and replacing it with its contrary, an idea that will corrupt the education of the youth.

[64] Eyeing this problem, Socrates offers his solution in his fantasy of a philosophical Sparta. In this Sparta, the wise sophists have moral authority to instruct the citizens and corrupting influences are kept away: foreigners are excluded and the youth are not permitted to travel to other cities for fear that they might “unlearn what they are taught.” Now, it might be suggested that foreigners are only excluded intermittently. But as the travel restriction shows, the principle that

87. Especially when all of the tricks of sophistry are deployed to further confuse them, and when these contests take place in contexts not conducive to good deliberation.

explains social arrangements is that the city's education must be preserved. So while perhaps this philosophical Sparta has its visitors, no doubt if a poet came to visit the Spartan sophists would crown him with laurels and send him on his way without permitting him to speak to the youth (*Rep.* III, 397e–398b).⁸⁸ As one scholar has described Plato's most famous fantasy regime, "the political institutions sketched in the *Republic* should be understood mainly as providing the environment necessary for proper education."⁸⁹ Just so. What I have shown is that the *Protagoras* diagnoses the same general problem with free society and proposes the same general solution. That problem is seen as endemic to any free society. That solution is the rejection of freedom and the construction of a regime based on the strict control of poetry and the indoctrination of the citizenry into a fixed cultural canon.⁹⁰

[65] The political argument of the *Protagoras* is now fully in view.

88. It might also be suggested that the problem here is not necessarily one with freedom but rather one with *foreignness*. In the *Apology*, Socrates argues that he would never intentionally corrupt the youth because it would be harmful to him—he would have to live with the result! So he has a stake in properly educating his fellow citizens. And this is contrasted with the foreign sophists (*Ap.* 19e ff.); if their education corrupts the city, they can just pick up and move. The *Protagoras* heavily emphasizes the foreignness of the sophists, and the danger of foreign influence is of course prominent in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. But there is no suggestion in the *Protagoras* that if only the city kept to itself that the problem of praise in a free society would somehow dissipate. All of the same dynamics would be in play.

89. Klosko (2006, p. 142).

90. That the philosophical Sparta is intended as a positive recommendation is quite clear: it is praised as the most philosophical society, superior to all others, the object of eager imitation among the ancient wise Sages; it happens to neatly solve all of the problems with free society that Plato has taken such pains to illustrate for his reader in the dialogue—clearly the reader is supposed to look at the philosophical Sparta as a model that any society ought to emulate!

In this dialogue, Plato gives his reader a theory of socialization in Protagoras' Great Speech that is played out by the representative figures of Hippocrates and Protagoras and (especially) Simonides. In view of this problem, Socrates expresses in his sketch of a philosophical Sparta his proposed solution: that the city might come to be ruled by a small group of self-controlled and philosophically-oriented rulers who have been raised in the spirit of Socratic philosophy and who have absorbed his ethical teachings and philosophical methods. The absolute rule of such a philosophical council would avoid the pitfalls of a free society and sustain a city made happy through the rulers' cooperative practice of philosophy with one another and the control of poetry and elimination of political freedom for everyone else.⁹¹

91. A likely objection to this reading of the political argument of the *Protagoras* and of the Socratic dialogues as a whole is that Socrates seems to suggest in the *Apology* (23ab) that full ethical knowledge is in fact *impossible* for human beings—that such knowledge is reserved for the gods. If this is so, then it may seem that some of the problems of ignorant advisors and judges would afflict an unfree politics just as much as any democracy. This is often taken to be an important claim that can be leveraged into a vision of Socratic politics. E.g., Klosko (2006, p. 135): “Because Socrates believes that moral knowledge lies beyond the capacity of the human soul, he has an undeveloped conception of such knowledge and believes basically that all individuals are alike in being unable to attain it. It is largely as a result of this conception of knowledge that Socrates is able to believe that all people are fundamentally equal. Again, because moral knowledge is beyond the reach of everyone, all are equal in terms of what they know.” — Perhaps the *Protagoras* only argues its way to a standoff, then—a classic Socratic aporia—on the question of the best regime. It may diagnose a few *problems* with free society or democratic governance and perhaps might suggest some reforms, but does not offer anything radically different as a political ideal.

However, as should now be clear, even should full ethical knowledge be beyond human ability, Socrates himself is evidence that certain commitments can be discovered and maintained that will likely cause human life to go better. Considering what his critique of sophistry entails for politics—the question of how the conditions of a good education for political rulers could be maintained—the *Protagoras* is properly read as rejecting free so-

3.5.4 Conclusion

[66] Such is the political argument of the *Protagoras*. And this argument represents a significant revision of our understanding of the dialogue. The existing literature interprets the text as offering an argument that lives, we might say, only at the personal or individual level. The text is a critique of certain bad philosophical or educational ideas that Protagoras is committed to and, consequently, of certain sophistic methods of conversation. But while it is certainly true that this individual-level critique is one of Socrates' efforts, we now see that the lesson for private philosophical practitioners is intertwined with an argument about political and social institutions that takes aim, fundamentally, at free society.

[67] Accordingly, the argument of this chapter not only offers a new reading of the *Protagoras* itself but also forces us to reevaluate our understanding of the overall political outlook of Plato's Socratic dialogues. Consider two common claims about the politics of the Socratic dialogues. First, it is often suggested that these texts do not contain a political theory as such. As Gregory Vlastos's influential insistence has it, "Socrates is exclusively a moral philosopher."⁹² He may comment here or there on

ciety. No free society could ever maintain a good system of education. In contrast, the dialogue holds out the hope that an unfree society ruled by a philosophical council might be able to serve the city and its citizens better, even should that ruling council never attain full ethical knowledge.

In other words, once we put together (1) the argument about the corruption of education in free society, (2) the "methodological" critique of sophistry, and (3) the praise of Sparta, we come to an anti-democratic conclusion. And this before we allow in considerations from other Socratic dialogues that would further support the argument (see the *Charmides* and *Gorgias* essays).

92. Vlastos (1991, p. 47).

politics, but such comments are simply political “views,” not essentially related to his core philosophical commitments and never really developed into any political *theory*, in the sense of serious reflection about political institutions or the question of the best regime. At most, Socrates practices a “politics by other means,” caring for the souls of his fellow citizens through his private exhortations to virtue in the context in which he finds himself, rejecting the thought that different political institutions would have an appreciable impact on the likelihood of success in moral education and reform.⁹³

[68] Compatible with the view that Socrates does not engage in detailed political reflection, and often found alongside it, is a second commonplace about the politics of the Socratic dialogues, that (in weaker versions) they at least accept or (more strongly) that they celebrate democracy. We may find criticism of Athens in these texts, but it is friendly criticism: “Socrates’ ... attempt to exorcise the glamour of tyranny [from Athenian culture] ... makes the philosopher an ally of democracy”; Plato and Socrates are “sympathetic critics recalling their fellow citizens to the true practice of democracy.”⁹⁴ Insofar as the dialogues *are* doing politi-

93. So we find one scholar claiming that “Socrates’ political practice amounts to a new kind of politics ... In keeping with the Greek view that the chief responsibility of the *polis* is to see to the moral betterment of its citizens, Socrates’ goal must be judged ‘political’. But Socrates’ pursuit of this end is distinctive in that he sought to attain it without recourse to political means” Klosko (2006, p. 54, cf. 35). Cf. Schofield (2008, p. 26), Villa (2001).

I have run together two dimensions that could be separated: (1) how thoroughly “theorized” Socrates’ political views are; (2) whether those political views amount to a rejection of political *means* as beside the point (not doing much to help or to harm) when it comes to making citizens virtuous or vicious.

94. Quotations are respectively: Euben (1994, p. 209), Tarnopolsky (2010, p. 95, cf. 16). In addition to these works, see generally Vlastos (1983a),

cal work, it is political work that endorses as an ideal (or at least finds acceptable) a democratic political arrangement.

[69] Against these common claims about Socratic politics, this chapter has shown that the *Protagoras* (often taken to be the paradigmatically “Socratic” Socratic dialogue) both (1) advances a serious argument about political institutions and (2) comes to a thoroughly antidemocratic conclusion. Any free society, the text argues, will tend toward corruption. For the operation of unscrupulous and unthinking “peddlers of praise,” motivated by a desire for reputation and profit, will undermine whatever morally salutary beliefs do have standing in society, knocking down these models to praise in their place bad ideals in imitation of which the youth will become corrupted. The solution to this problem is suggested in Socrates’ sketch of a philosophical Sparta, and comes out to a picture that anticipates the Kallipolis of the *Republic*: a society lacking political and cultural freedom, one that is characterized by the strict control of poetry, ruled by a small council of philosopher-aristocrats.⁹⁵

[70] In the Socratic dialogues, then, we find Plato intentionally “constructing Kallipolis,” one argument at a time.⁹⁶ While the complete picture is not fully painted until the *Republic*, a careful reading of the early

Vlastos (1991), Euben (1997), Saxonhouse (2006), Rowe (2007, p. 39n17), Tuozzo (2001).

95. What is more, this political argument in the *Protagoras* can be supplemented and strengthened by arguments found elsewhere in the Socratic dialogues. See the chapters on the *Charmides* and *Gorgias*. The three arguments are mutually supporting and all tend toward the same conclusion.
96. It is not a new thought that Plato’s Socratic dialogues are proleptic or forward looking. But commentators who have supposed as much have other aspects of the texts in mind. See e.g. Jaeger (1943, pp. 123–125), Friedländer (1964, pp. 36–37), Klosko (2006, pp. 27–28, esp. p. 28n46), Kahn (1998).

work reveals that Plato is always working politically and is never sympathetic to democracy in any strong sense. When Socrates says in passing that he “speaks bitter words, both in private and in public” criticizing Athens (*Gorgias* 522bc) or when he mentions that he has always thought Crete and Sparta to be well-governed (*Crito* 53a), we should read these clues as sincere and understand them in their obvious sense. Plato’s Socrates is no democrat—from the beginning, he looks toward a radically new kind of politics, an unfree society ruled by a philosophical elite.

| Bibliography

- Adam, J. and A.M. Adam. *Platonis Protagoras*. Cambridge University Press, 1893.
- Bartlett, Robert. “Political Philosophy and Sophistry: An Introduction to Plato’s *Protagoras*.” *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2003): 612–624.
- Bell, J.M. “*Kimbix kai sophos*: Simonides in the Anecdotal Tradition.” *Quaderni Ubinati di Cultura Classica* 28 (1978): 29–86.
- Benson, Hugh. *Socratic Wisdom*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Benson, Hugh. “A Note on Socratic Self-Knowledge in the *Charmides*.” *Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2003): 31–47.
- Beresford, Adam. “Nobody’s Perfect: A New Text and Interpretation of Simonides *PMG* 542.” *Classical Philology* 103 (2008): 237–256.
- Beresford, Adam. “Erasing Simonides.” *Apeiron* 42, no. 3 (2009): 185–220.
- Bobonich, Christopher. *Plato’s Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Brennan, Tad. “The Implicit Refutation of Critias.” *Phronesis* 57 (2012): 240–250.
- Brickhouse, Thomas and Nicholas Smith. *Plato’s Socrates*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Brickhouse, Thomas and Nicholas Smith. *Socratic Moral Psychology*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Brickhouse, Thomas and Nicholas Smith. “Response to Critics.” *Analytic Philosophy* 53, no. 2 (2012): 234–248.
- Burnyeat, Miles. “*Apology* 30B 2–4: Socrates, Money, and the Grammar of ΓΙΓΝΕΣΘΑΙ.” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (2003): 1–25.

- Burnyeat, Miles. "Dramatic Aspects of Plato's *Protagoras*." *Classical Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2013): 419–422.
- Carson, Anne. "How Not to Read a Poem: Unmixing Simonides from 'Protagoras'." *Classical Philology* 87, no. 2 (1992): 110–130.
- Cooper, John (ed.). *Plato: Complete Works*. Hackett, 1997.
- Cooper, John. "Socrates and Plato in Plato's *Gorgias*." In *Reason and Emotion*, Chap. 2, 29–75. Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Cooper, John. "Two Theories of Justice." In *Knowledge, Nature, and the Good: Essays on Ancient Philosophy*, Chap. 10, 247–269. Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Corey, David. *The Sophists in Plato's Dialogues*. SUNY Press, 2015.
- Denniston, J.D. *The Greek Particles*. 2nd ed. Hackett, 1996.
- Denyer, Nicholas (ed.). *Plato: Protagoras*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Dodds, E.R. *Plato: Gorgias*. Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Euben, J. Peter. "Democracy and Political Theory: A Reading of Plato's *Gorgias*." In Euben, J. Peter, J.R. Wallach, and Josh Ober (eds.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, 198–226. Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Euben, J. Peter. *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture and Political Theory*. Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Friedländer, Paul. *Plato*, vol. 2. Bollingen Foundation, 1964.
- Gagarin, Michael. "The Purpose of Plato's *Protagoras*." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 100 (1969): 133–164.
- Irwin, Terrence. *Plato's Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Jaeger, Werner. *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 2. Oxford University Press, 1943.
- Jones, A.H.M. "Athenian Democracy and Its Critics." *The Cambridge Historical Journal* 11, no. 1 (1953): 1–26.
- Jones, Russell. "Wisdom and Happiness in *Euthydemus* 278–282." *Philosophers' Imprint* 13, no. 4 (2013): 1–21.

- Kahn, Charles. *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Klosko, George. *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*. Rev. ed. Methuen, 2006.
- Krentz, Peter. *The Thirty At Athens*. Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Landauer, Matthew. *Accountability and Advice in Greek Political Thought*. Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University (2012).
- Landauer, Matthew. "The *Idiotes* and the Tyrant: Two Faces of Unaccountability in Democratic Athens." *Political Theory* 42, no. 2 (2014): 139–166.
- McKim, Richard. "Socratic Self-Knowledge and "Knowledge of Knowledge" in Plato's *Charmides*." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 115 (1985): 59–77.
- Moss, Jessica. "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef: Pleasure and Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*." *Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2007): 229–249.
- Nehemas, Alexander. *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates*. Princeton University Press, 1998.
- North, Helen. *Sophrosyne: Self-knowledge and self-restraint in Greek literature*. Cornell University Press, 1966.
- Ober, Josiah. *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*. Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Penner, Terry. "Socrates." In Rowe, Christopher and Malcom Schofield (eds.), *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, 164–189. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Prior, William. "Socratic Metaphysics." In Smith, Nicholas D. and John Bussanich (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*, Chap. 4, 68–93. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Rademaker, Adriaan. *Sophrosyne and the Rhetoric of Self-Restraint*. Brill, 2005.
- Reshotko, Naomi. *Socratic Virtue: Making the Best of the Neither-Good-nor-Bad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Rowe, Christopher. "The Place of the *Republic* in Plato's Political Thought." In Ferrari, G.R.F. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, Chap. 2, 27–54. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

- Rowe, Christopher. "Self-Examination." In Morrison, Donald (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, Chap. 9, 201–214. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Rutherford, R.B. *The Art of Plato: Ten Essays on Platonic Interpretation*. Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Saxonhouse, Arlene. *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Schofield, Malcolm. "Socrates Versus Protagoras." In Gower, Barry S. and Michael C. Stokes (eds.), *Socratic Questions: New Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates and its Significance*, Chap. 4, 122–136. Routledge, 1992.
- Schofield, Malcolm. "Euboulia in the *Iliad*." In *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms*, 3–30. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Schofield, Malcom. "Approaching the *Republic*." In Rowe, Christopher and Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, Chap. 10, 190–232. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Sedley, David. "Myth, punishment, and politics in the *Gorgias*." In Partenie, Catalin (ed.), *Plato's Myths*, Chap. 2, 51–76. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Stauffer, Devin. *The Unity of Plato's Gorgias*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Stern, Paul. "Tyranny and Self-Knowledge: Critias and Socrates in Plato's *Charmides*." *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999): 399–412.
- Tarnopolsky, Christina. *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame*. Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Taylor, C.C.W. *Plato: Protagoras*. Revised ed. Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Trivigno, Franco V. "Childish Nonsense? The Value of Interpretation in Plato's *Protagoras*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 51, no. 4 (2013): 509–543.
- Tuozzo, Thomas. "What's Wrong with These Cities? The Social Dimension of *sophrosune* in Plato's *Charmides*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39, no. 3 (2001): 321–350.

Tuozzo, Thomas. *Plato's Charmides: Positive elenchus in a 'Socratic' dialogue*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Villa, Dana. *Socratic Citizenship*. Princeton University Press, 2001.

Vlastos, Gregory. "Introduction." In *Plato: Protagoras*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.

Vlastos, Gregory. "The Historical Socrates and Athenian Democracy." *Political Theory* 11 (1983a): 495–515.

Vlastos, Gregory. "The Socratic Elenchus." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983b): 27–58.

Vlastos, Gregory. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*. Cornell University Press, 1991.